

To Fuel Your Radiance

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/7565122) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/7565122>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe , Supernatural Elements , Deal with a Devil , Hannibal is Hannibal , Will is something else entirely , Devil Will , Dark Will , pretentious conversations , Blasphemy probably , Canon-Typical Violence , Murder , Torture , Murder Husbands , Anal Sex , Rough Sex , Bondage , Chains , Murder Basement , Asphyxiation , Choking , Prostate Massage , Bloodplay , Knifeplay , Violent Sex , Top Hannibal , Top Will Graham , no safewords , but that's what you get when you fuck the Devil , thoughts of sex and death , roleplay that's super real , but Will is immortal so they're fine , Porn With Plot
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of To Fuel Your Radiance
Collections:	Fresh Meat Friday , HannigramAreMYMurderHusbands , Coup de coeur mais vraiment , HannibalFanFicsToReReadOften
Stats:	Published: 2016-07-23 Completed: 2017-01-16 Words: 21,340 Chapters: 9/9

To Fuel Your Radiance

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Summary

AU where Will is the actual Devil. After Hannibal sells his soul, a fascination begins to develop between them. Will is intrigued by the unique monster Hannibal is, while Hannibal thinks Will is the most magnificent thing he's ever encountered. As their conversations continue, their involvement with each other becomes something else entirely.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Content note: Really vague reference to sexual assault regarding Mischa in this chapter.

General note: Original prompt for this fic [here](#). Though I pretty much just took 'Will is the devil and Hannibal sells his soul' and ran in my own direction with it. :)

Hannibal found Mischa in a field of flowers.

Her clothing was bloody and her eyes were blank and open, the color of the sky they stared up at without seeing. Picked flowers spilled out of her open hand.

Hannibal's blood ran cold, and the punch in his gut could only be described as sudden and irrevocable grief. It was without question the most intense emotion he had ever felt. He was surprised to find his face wet as he knelt to touch her, to close her eyes and brush her hair back.

Her hair was blonde, much lighter than his. He used to wonder if it would darken, or if it would stay light like the color their mother's had been. Hannibal pressed his forehead to hers, her skin still warm, and wished beyond anything that time could be reversed.

When he straightened, he was no longer alone.

A visage of Mischa stood before him, a perfect reflection of his dead sister down to the buttons on the dress. She gave him a small smile.

Hannibal's first instinct was to get to his feet, but something else told him that he would be at no better advantage. So he stayed where he was, on his knees by his sister's body.

"What would you give?" asked the other.

"I beg your pardon?"

"To have me back. What's it worth to you?"

Hannibal sniffed, looking into the eyes that were not Mischa's. "Do me the courtesy of not pretending to be my sister, and I will listen to what you have to say."

The other stared at him for a moment, before saying, "I'll extend that courtesy so far, but no farther."

The form in front of him didn't change, but there was a subtle shifting of posture, a redistribution of weight and attitude that left nothing childlike about the figure besides the shape. The eyes that stared back at him were cold, set in a face with a distant expression.

It reminded Hannibal of himself.

"You can bring her back?" he asked.

"I can. For a price." It was Mischa's voice saying words she had never said, with an inflection that was entirely other.

"My soul." Hannibal arrived at the obvious answer without even asking the question. One hand was still fisted in Mischa's shirt, anchoring him to her.

"Yes. Your soul, freely given, mine to collect upon your death and to do with as I please."

"And you would be?" Hannibal prompted.

"Does it matter?" the other asked.

"No."

And it didn't. If he was to make a Faustian bargain for Mischa's life, it was immaterial who it was with, as long as it produced the desired result.

Hannibal stared up at the demon, unafraid, and boldly stated, "My soul is yours, in exchange for my sister's death undone."

"Agreed." The word had an air of finality to it. "Your blood will be required as a seal."

"What must I do?"

"Cut your palm until the blood flows, and bring it to her face."

Hannibal let go of Mischa and reached for his pocketknife. He sliced deep across his hand in one smooth motion, and brought it over her.

The doppelganger knelt on the other side of Mischa's body, and took Hannibal's wrist in a grip that was unforgiving. Hannibal's palm was pressed over Mischa's cheeks and across her forehead, painting her in blood. Then he was released.

"Blood for blood," Hannibal said. A long moment passed as he stared at his sister.

The other traced a finger counterclockwise through the blood on Mischa's face, before bringing it to lips for a taste.

"Do you wonder," the false Mischa said casually, arching a brow, "if you'll find yourself here again? Kneeling beside her lifeless body, gripping a knife? A picture created by your own hand?"

Hannibal's lips pulled into something that was almost a snarl. "I would never harm her."

"You wouldn't plan to." The demon looked straight into him, holding his gaze with piercing blue eyes that were both Mischa's not Mischa's. "But I can *see* you. I can see all the things you do, the things you want to do."

"Not to her."

A twisted smirk. "Time will tell."

Then the world shifted, and time reordered.

Hannibal was standing in the field.

Mischa was ahead of him, picking flowers. A man from the village was next to her. She was ignoring him as only children wrapped up in their own worlds can ignore someone, but she cried out when he tugged sharply on her arm.

Hannibal was already moving. He was on the man in seconds, ripping him away from Mischa and throwing him face down in the grass. With a knee pressed into his back, Hannibal yanked the man's head up and drew his blade across his throat. The man shuddered violently, gurgling and gasping, and then it was over.

Hannibal wiped his knife on the man's shirt before getting to his feet. He turned around.

Mischa stood, her dropped flowers all but forgotten.

"You killed him," she said simply. "Like Chiyoh does the birds."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I had to." Hannibal extended his hand in her direction. "Come. We must return to the house."

Mischa slipped her hand into his without question, despite what she had just seen. Hannibal started to walk, his sister in one hand, a blood-smeared knife in the other. Neither seemed to be in contradiction.

As they crossed the fields, Hannibal went into his memory palace, sealing off the spaces where he had ever seen her dead.

But one room, not the one she was in, he left open, just a crack.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Just so we're all on the same page about which version of Will Graham devil! Will looks like, it's this one. ;)



At exactly six o'clock, Hannibal opened his office door.

"Will Graham?"

The man in the waiting room stood, smoothing his jacket as he got to his feet. "Yes. Thank you for seeing me on such short notice."

"Not at all. Please, come in."

Hannibal held the door open as Will moved past him, inhaling as the other man passed and quietly shutting the door.

Will walked farther into the room, admiring his surroundings, neck craned as he glanced up toward the second level. "You have a beautiful office here, Doctor."

"Thank you. The library is one I've collected over many years."

Hannibal took his own customary seat, and after another moment, Will sat in the one opposite.

"What brings you to therapy?" Hannibal asked.

“I’ve been having trouble sleeping.”

“Have you?”

Will glared at him slightly. “Yes. I have. That’s why I’m here.”

Hannibal brought his hands together. “Our conversation is not going to be productive if you are not honest with me.”

“Dr. Lecter, I—”

“Are you the Morningstar?” Hannibal cut him off.

Interruption was rude, but Hannibal saw no reason to prolong the charade.

Will was visibly stunned at the words, before an expression of dark amusement settled over his features. The façade dropped, and Hannibal was regarded with a gaze as cool as his own.

“I’m impressed, Doctor. It’s a rare person who can see me and know me. But I don’t think I’ve ever been noticed by someone who doesn’t have, shall we say, unearthly gifts.”

“I must confess, all I see is man,” Hannibal said. “But your smell is unmistakable. A peculiar mix of ozone and petrichor, lightning and ash. Everything that makes a storm with just a hint of brimstone. I have only smelled it one other time before today.”

“The day your sister died.”

“The day my sister lived.”

Will’s lips turned up in a smirk. “How is your sister?”

“Happily living in Florence,” Hannibal said easily. “I have a home there.” Then he said, “You suggested I might kill her.”

“Not an unreasonable suggestion, considering.” He raised an eyebrow. “Is she aware of what you are?”

“She’s aware enough.”

“And did you? Ever consider killing her?” Will leaned back in his chair, crossing his legs. “Ever long to see the beauty of her death?”

“No. And should I ever feel the desire to do so, precautions are in place.” Chiyoh was more loyal to Mischa than she ever was to him, and she wouldn’t hesitate to do whatever was needed to protect her. “A fail-safe to my own whimsy.” Hannibal paused. “Would it have pleased you to see me kill her?”

“I was curious what would happen.” He tilted his head. “That’s all.”

“Are you a curious person, Will?”

A small smile. "Always."

"I should ask, is there another name you prefer to be called?"

"Will is as true a name as any other. But less burdened with agenda."

Hannibal nodded to himself, crossing his own legs and mirroring Will's position. "What is your agenda today, if I may ask? Are such visits customary?"

Will inclined his head in affirmation. "I visit anyone I make a deal with, once sometime later in their lives. Merely to look into their eyes and see what they've become."

"You do this not as yourself?"

"I'm always myself. I simply don't announce myself as such. Since you're a doctor, a simple consultation seemed an obvious way to acquire a few moments of your time."

"And now that you have?" Hannibal asked, holding his gaze. "What do you see?"

Will stared back at him, eyes narrowing slightly in thoughtful consideration. "The same thing I saw before, only now bloomed to fruition and twisted in a way that even such thorny branches were never meant to grow." He shifted in his chair, bringing his hands up to the armrests as he regarded Hannibal. "I saw you then, saw what I thought you would become, but my expectations were undone. You defy categorization."

Hannibal couldn't help the smile that spread over his face.

Will laughed. "You take that as flattery."

"I'm afraid I must, considering the source," Hannibal said. "It seems a rare accolade indeed. Tell me, what did you expect to find here today?"

"A garden-variety psychopath."

"Most psychopaths are exceedingly dull."

Will's lips quirked. "Is that your professional opinion?"

"It is. They have one track minds, usually with room for little else. May I offer you a glass of wine?"

"If you're having one."

Hannibal stood, moving to the cabinet to take out two glasses. "Let it never be said that I am a poor host." He uncorked a new bottle, letting it breathe before he poured it. After walking back across the room, he handed Will a glass before taking his own seat once more.

Hannibal took a sip from his glass, before looking at Will. "Last time you appeared as my sister. Who are you today, if I may ask?"

“I always appear as a loved one when offering a deal. It provokes an emotional response.” Will took a drink, then swirled the wine in his glass. “Today, I am myself. I prefer this form above others.”

“I can see why.”

Will arched a brow. “Are you flirting with me, Doctor?”

“I would not be so bold.” Hannibal smiled. “Merely an acknowledgment of aesthetics. A man who can choose his own appearance has no reason to repine.”

“I’m not a man.”

“Indeed not,” Hannibal said, inclining his head. “My apologies. What language do you favor in reference to yourself?”

“Language has point of view and is subject to those who created it. ‘Angel’ is correct, ‘devil’ is correct, but neither encompasses true reality,” Will said, his tone slow and measured. “Words circle the indefinable like pack hunters. Words are limited; I’m not limited.”

“What are you, then?”

“I am.”

Hannibal’s mouth twitched. “That is what God said.”

Will raised his eyebrows, a smirk on his lips. “God wasn’t wrong.”

“Would you like to discuss God?”

“Not particularly,” Will said dryly. “Would you?”

Hannibal took another drink of wine before setting his glass down. “Perhaps another time. Our conversation could continue.”

Will stared at him a moment, cool and appraising, before he said, “You’re intrigued by me.”

“Of course I am,” Hannibal said easily, having no reason to deny it. “If I defy categorization, you exist entirely outside it. A chance to converse with the Devil himself is a singular experience.”

“One which by definition you have already had.”

“One which I would further prolong,” Hannibal countered. “If you are amenable.”

Will regarded Hannibal thoughtfully, something arch and amused in his expression. He took a drink, before saying, “I’m not disinclined to being amenable.”

“We are in agreement, then.” Hannibal reached for his glass and smiled. “When shall we begin?”

Chapter 3

The next evening, Will was once again precisely on time.

Hannibal opened his front door to see Will standing on the step. He couldn't help but notice there were no footprints in the snow on the sidewalk behind him.

Will saw him noticing. An eyebrow raised, and one corner of his mouth turned up.

Hannibal knew the beginnings of a smirk were already on his own lips. He looked at Will. "I must admit, I never assumed you would literally appear at my door."

Will did smirk then. "What did you assume?"

"I have no assumptions where you are concerned. You are entirely beyond me. Please, come in."

"Thank you, Dr. Lecter."

"Hannibal, please. May I take your coat?"

Will nodded, elegantly shrugging off his coat and handing to him. He studied Hannibal with a sideways look as Hannibal hung it on the coat rack. "Surely you must have some preconceived notions of me."

Hannibal turned, regarding him evenly. "I have many things I would like to discuss with you, but one cannot have true experiences if one's mind is not open."

"And what do you hope to gain from my mind?"

"Whatever you will permit me."

Will tilted his head slightly. "How long do you imagine this continuing?"

"That is up to you." Hannibal held his gaze, unblinking. "I myself imagine we could share a thousand conversations and still have more to discuss."

Will smiled, more to himself than to Hannibal. "You're not afraid of me at all, are you?"

"Fear, at its most basic, is a survival signal, a warning of impending death. I've always found the idea of death comforting. The thought that my life could end at any moment frees me. Death comes to all. Death at your hands would be majestic."

Will abruptly laughed, looking like he surprised himself by doing so.

The genuine reaction made Hannibal smile himself. It was clear Will wasn't mocking him; rather, he seemed delighted.

“You actually mean that,” Will said, collecting himself. “You’re not trying to flatter me or gain my favor.”

“I can think of no better way to die,” Hannibal said easily. “But unless that is your design tonight, perhaps we should continue to dinner.”

“By all means.”

Hannibal gestured for Will to precede him into the dining room.

There were two place settings across from each other, and Hannibal allowed Will to take the one in front of the fireplace. It was the usual seat he gave to guests, though he admitted that the placement was particularly fitting in this case.

“Your timing was perfect,” Hannibal said. “I had only just removed our meal from the oven. Excuse me for a moment.”

Hannibal went into the kitchen and quickly but meticulously plated the dish, then returned to the dining room. He set Will’s plate down, and then his own.

“Loin, served with a balsamic cranberry sauce, along with roasted squash.”

“What sort of loin?” Will asked. The arch expression on his face said he already knew.

Hannibal’s lips quirked. “Nothing I imagine will be a revelation to you.” He poured the wine for them, before taking his seat. “Or am I incorrect?”

“Not at all.” Will cut a bite of meat, then brought the fork to his lips. He chewed thoughtfully.

Hannibal watched him intently. “How do you find it?”

Will swallowed. “It’s delicious. My compliments.” He took a drink of wine.

“And how do you find it in general?” Hannibal asked, picking up his knife and fork.

“Cannibalism, you mean?”

“It’s not cannibalism. Certainly not for you.”

“No, it’s not,” Will allowed. He picked up his wine glass again.

Hannibal took the moment to admire the picture Will made, outlined by the flicker of the fire behind him. That such a figure should be seated at his own table seemed a thing he could hardly credit.

“I don’t find any particular joy or abhorrence in it,” Will said. “I’ve never gone out of my way for the experience, though I’ve never refused the opportunity when presented.” He raised an eyebrow. “And you?”

“I find the opportunity frequently presents itself.” Hannibal took a bite.

“You create the opportunity.”

“The opportunity is there, merely waiting to be taken.”

Will looked amused. “And how do you find cannibalism?”

“It’s only cannibalism if we’re equals.” Hannibal smiled and cut another bite. “I put them to better use.”

Will studied him in the silence afterward, and for a few moments, there was only the sound of their silverware against the china.

Then Will said, “Yesterday you called me the Morningstar. How did you know exactly who I was?”

“An educated guess. At my sister’s side, you said my soul would be yours to do with as you pleased. I imagine there is only one being who can make such a claim. Unlikely, then, that you were a lesser demon, but rather the Devil himself.”

Will huffed, a half-laugh. “There are no lesser demons.”

“Are there not?” Hannibal asked with interest. “Most agree that one third of Heaven’s angels were cast out in your wake.”

“A falsehood.”

“So says the Devil to all tales about him,” Hannibal said with a smile, raising his glass slightly.

“There is little truth in any tale about me, beyond the barest essentials.”

Hannibal regarded Will curiously. “What is your opinion of the Bible?”

“A collection of fables on morality, bent to the whims of the writer.”

“Because it is the word of God?”

“Because it is the word of Man,” Will said, setting down his knife. “If you think God is to be found within the Bible, you’re mistaken.”

Hannibal held Will’s gaze, fascinated. “And where is God to be found?”

Will smiled. “God only knows.”

Hannibal smiled in turn. Will didn’t look away, and while the smile slowly faded from his lips, it remained in his eyes.

“Perhaps you will tell me your story,” Hannibal said, “some other evening.”

“Perhaps,” Will said, silently agreeing that there would be another evening.

“May I ask, how unusual an occurrence is our continued conversation?”

“I have no reason to visit anyone I’ve made a deal with more than once,” Will said, taking another bite. “There have been others that I met and remet, but only to satisfy my own curiosity and amusement. Most conversations are not worth continuing.”

“But you find this one to be so.”

“Yes.”

“You find our conversation interesting, then? Or do I just amuse you? I take no offense if the latter,” Hannibal added, the corners of his mouth twisting up. “To be amusing to the Devil is still a distinction worth having.”

Will picked up his glass, seeming to gather his words as he stared into it. “I have never encountered anyone like you. And I’ve seen more of creation than you can imagine.” He took a sip, before slowly setting the glass down and looking at Hannibal. “I find you interesting. And having a conversation as myself, unfettered by concealment or expectation, is an experience I’ve not been otherwise afforded.”

Hannibal held Will’s gaze. Threads of their conversation crystallized into one succinct thought. “You are alone because you are unique.”

“I’m as alone as you are,” Will replied evenly.

“Then we are alone together,” Hannibal said. He raised his glass, an offering and an invitation. “Just alike.”

Will licked his lips and smiled. Then he raised his glass to Hannibal’s.

Chapter 4

Hannibal's plastic suit squeaked as he leaned over the man in the chair, who gurgled and gave a silent scream as Hannibal held his mouth open and skillfully cut out his tongue.

Satisfied, Hannibal moved to place the tongue on ice in a small container he had brought for the purpose. Then he turned to Dr. Singer, who lay in one of his own dental chairs, paralyzed with his neck broken. Blood ran from his mouth, covering his chin and decorating his shirt.

Hannibal had already severed his vocal cords, and now he picked up one of the nearby dental tools and shoved it through the man's neck with surgical precision, missing both his airway and his arteries. For now.

The doctor made a choking noise.

Hannibal surveyed the dental tools, choosing the next with care. His nostrils flared as he caught a breath of new air in the room and he inhaled, pausing in his movements.

"Hello, Will," he said, not turning around.

"Hello," Will said casually, as if he hadn't just appeared out of thin air to Hannibal mutilating a dentist after hours.

Will walked into his line of sight, moving to stand beside him.

Dr. Singer looked up at him, but the desperation in his eyes quickly faded as Will stared at him with detachment before focusing on Hannibal.

Hannibal drove the dental pick in his hand straight through the doctor's neck, puncturing an artery inside. But it would produce a slow internal bleed as long as the metal wasn't pulled out. There was a chance he might even drown on his own blood.

"Care to join me?" Hannibal asked, arching a brow. He wouldn't mind sharing such a thing with Will. He reflected upon it, and saw it a shining possibility.

Will shook his head. The expression on his face was neutral, not one of distaste or one of interest. "But continue, by all means."

"Did you come to watch me work?"

"I can leave if you like." Will gave a minuscule shrug, raising his brows.

"Not at all."

Hannibal picked up another tool. Will slowly moved away, circling the chair until he was on the opposite side of it.

"Is this the first time anyone has seen you do this?" Will asked.

“Besides the one I’m doing it to? Yes.” Hannibal drove the dental tool in, earning another gurgling noise.

Will’s lips quirked. “And how does that feel?”

“Reassuring. You have the ability to truly see me,” Hannibal said with a smile. “Are you sure I can’t tempt you?” He swung the dental tray around, bringing it between them, offering Will his pick of implement.

“This doesn’t look that tempting,” Will said, blunt.

Hannibal tilted his head, studying Will. “Does it offend you?”

“Not particularly. But neither do I find it gratifying.” Will’s eyes drifted over the man in the chair. His gaze was clinical, not compassionate, as he said, “There’s little pleasure to be had in torturing the undeserving.”

“We have a difference of opinion on what is deserving, then.”

Will smiled, his lips curving up as he met Hannibal’s gaze. “I think you’ll find mine is the only one that matters, in the end.”

Hannibal regarded Will evenly over the dying body of Dr. Singer. “I am deserving,” he stated.

Will licked his lips. “Yes.”

“This is an act that would earn punishment at your hand in Hell.”

“Yes.”

Hannibal idly picked up another tool. “You do not condone this man’s death, but neither do you interfere with it.”

“Death comes to all. The destruction of life is to be found anywhere one looks in the world. I’m not a savior. I act with my own purpose and motivation.”

“Your presence and inaction could be construed as tacit participation. The philosophers among us might argue that you would punish the very crime you commit.”

Will laughed softly. “I’m morally corrupt by nature. I have no obligation to philosophers.”

Hannibal smiled.

Then he rammed the dental instrument through the doctor’s cheeks, the tool piercing one and coming out the other.

Will observed the spectacle, expression dispassionate.

Hannibal watched Will intently, losing all remaining interest in the man he was in the process of killing. “Tell me, Will, why are you motivated to punish those who revel in acts that are meaningless to you?”

Will glanced up, meeting his eyes with a look of fervor. “Because,” he said slowly, “doing bad things to bad people feels good.”

Hannibal’s breath caught.

“The acts have meaning,” Will continued. “They’re a beacon of malicious intent, a determiner of eligibility for my attention. The fact that you revel in blood makes me desire to revel in yours.”

Hannibal held Will’s gaze, enraptured. “And how does that make you feel?”

“Righteous,” Will declared, a gleam in his eye.

“And do I have your attention now, Will?”

“My undivided attention.”

“As you have mine.” Hannibal picked up his scalpel. “I suggest you stand back if you don’t want to ruin your coat.”

With that, Hannibal moved behind Dr. Singer and neatly drew the scalpel across his throat. An impressive amount of blood sprayed from the gash, considering what had already been lost, soaking the front of his shirt and spattering the nearby surroundings.

Will watched from the corner, his expression one of close interest. Hannibal knew it had nothing to do with seeing a death, and everything to do with their exchange.

When the blood flow subsided, Hannibal checked to make sure the doctor was dead, before walking around the chair to survey his handiwork.

He had encountered Dr. Singer at a bank nineteen months ago, where the man had cut in line and been loud and rude to the teller and anyone else who spoke to him. Hannibal had taken note of his name for later. The doctor had earned this silence, and his tongue was an appropriate organ to eat.

“Perhaps not as elaborate as some of my work,” Hannibal commented, “but a fitting monument nonetheless.” He glanced at Will, who had come up beside him. “I imagine you’ve seen many such monuments.”

“This is a monument to you, not to me.”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. “And if it were a monument to you?”

“I would find it pedestrian,” Will said in a dull tone.

“Duly noted.”

Will stared blankly ahead. "Those who think they serve me only serve themselves up to me. I have no interest in worshippers, no use for sycophants who kill in my name because they think the blood of the innocent will please me."

Hannibal couldn't help but say, "And who arbitrates true innocence?"

"I do." Will stated it as fact. "The innocent cannot enter Hell."

Hannibal inclined his head, conceding the point. "I suppose a philosophical debate is moot in such circumstances. There is no debate when there is an informed voice to be had."

Will laughed. "Does that disappoint you?"

"I find it enlightening. To have such certainty is a privilege afforded to few."

There was a pause, before Will spoke again. "The image of the Devil whispering in ears is a seductive one because it absolves blame. But my actions in the world are suggestion, possibilities born out of choices freely made. I never make anyone do anything. Cruelty is a gift humanity has given itself."

"Cruelty will always find its reward," Hannibal commented, thinking of his dinner menu.

Will turned to him, his brows raised and a smirk on his lips. "Yes, it will. I see to that."

"In the nineteenth century, it was wrongly believed that the last image seen by a dying person would be fixed on the retina." Hannibal paused, regarding Will intently. "Will you be the last image fixed on my dead eyes, Will?"

"Unlikely," Will said dryly. "I may be the judge and jury, but only after the execution. Your death will come to pass of its own volition, and then, you'll be mine."

"Do you want to possess me?"

Will wet his lips. "I already possess you."

"Do you want to understand me?"

"You want to understand me," Will replied smoothly.

"You must have some thoughts on me. Please, indulge my curiosity."

Will's eyes settled on Hannibal in a piercing stare. "You're not the product of anything, nor can you be reduced to a set of influences. You find beauty in giving voice to the unmentionable. You take life because you enjoy it and because you can."

Hannibal nodded. "The world is a wondrous place, and I intend to fully appreciate the beauty and horror of everything it has to offer." The corners of his mouth turned up. "Tell me, how will you punish me?"

"I haven't decided yet."

“When will you?”

“When I decide with everyone,” Will said plainly. “When you die.” He glanced to the side briefly, amusement flickering over his face. “Something Sisyphean, perhaps.”

Hannibal pursed his lips. “Appropriate, but not satisfactory, I’d imagine.” He paused. “You would want to do it with your hands.”

Will looked at him, eyes dark. “Yes.”

The moment hung, suspended, before Will slowly tilted his head, an arch look settling over his features. “How comes your understanding, Doctor?”

Hannibal smiled. “It slowly grows with each encounter. But such delights should not be rushed; a steady pace makes them all the more worthwhile.” He paused. “On the topic of delights, if I found someone you deemed deserving, would you join me? I can imagine nothing greater than seeing you revel, than in reveling with you.”

Will was silent for a long moment, his face an unreadable mask. “I’ll take it under consideration.”

“Please do.”

One corner of Will’s mouth twisted up. “Until next time, then.”

Hannibal nodded in acknowledgment. “Indeed.”

Will’s eyes swept the room before landing on Hannibal once more. Then he moved to the doorway, disappearing into the darkness of the hall.

The sound of his footsteps ceased entirely the second he was past the door.

Hannibal stared at the empty space, wholly alone, his pulse quickening as he slowly smiled.

Chapter 5

Will was seated at his table again a few days later.

Hannibal poured wine for them both, and then said, “I’ve prepared something for dinner I hope you’ll enjoy—a rare delicacy.”

Will arched a brow, amusement in his expression. “Rarer than long pig?”

“Long pig is not rare,” Hannibal said, smiling. “It exists in abundance. The serving of it, perhaps, is more singular. Please excuse me just a moment.”

Hannibal went into the kitchen and performed the last few preparations on the dish, before carrying it to the dining room.

Will’s interest was piqued as Hannibal set the flaming tray between them, the ortolans on it still burning. One corner of Will’s mouth turned up as he unfolded his napkin and placed it on his lap. “Your taste is whimsical tonight.”

“I found I could not resist the temptation,” Hannibal said, taking his own seat. “It seemed a fitting dish to serve the Devil. Among gourmands, the eating of the ortolan is considered a rite of passage,” he continued. “Preparation calls for the songbird to be drowned alive in Armagnac. It is then roasted and consumed whole in a single mouthful.”

Will reached for one of the birds. They were still engulfed by low flames. Fire flickered around his fingertips as he picked it up. Will regarded it with interest, unbothered by an object burning in his hand.

Hannibal was rarely caught off guard, but the impossible image Will presented made his breath stop.

Will met Hannibal’s gaze and smirked. “I believe tradition states that shrouds are to be worn during this meal, in order to hide our faces from God.”

The remaining ortolan had burned itself out, as had the one in Will’s hand. Hannibal picked up the other bird. “I don’t hide from God.”

“That works out well, then,” Will said. “God’s not looking for you.” With that, he raised his ortolan in a toast, and then brought it to his mouth.

After Will’s lips closed around the ortolan, Hannibal could hear the crunching of bones as Will slowly chewed. Hannibal started to eat his own mouthful of ortolan, the distinctive taste bursting across his tongue.

He held Will’s gaze as they both underwent the same experience.

Hannibal finally swallowed, savoring the flavor that remained, waiting before he took a drink of wine. “Shall we discuss God?”

“I suppose.”

“Where to begin? The subject is vast.”

Will picked up his wine glass. “I’ll leave it to you to direct the conversation.”

Hannibal reflected, considering his words. “I’ve always believed in God intimately. Yet I’ve not been bothered by any considerations of deity.”

“Did our encounter affect your beliefs?”

“If anything, it solidified them. You were proof that there was more in existence than human knowledge.” Hannibal paused. “It is a truth that God exists, but not one that has any bearing on me, other than to recognize how my own actions pale beside those of God.”

“Meaning?”

“While killing, I sometimes think about God. Killing must feel good to God, too. After all, he does it all the time.” Hannibal tilted his head. “Did you see the recent church collapse in Sicily? The façade fell on sixty five grandmothers during a special mass.”

Will arched a brow. “Was that God?”

“According to the underwriters,” Hannibal said, a smirk on his lips. “Storms and earthquakes, fires and floods are all lumped under acts of God.”

One corner of Will’s mouth turned up. “Most would find my existence proof of an opposing force, a benevolent God to stand against me.”

“How benevolent could God be to create you in the first place?” Hannibal took a drink of wine. “What purpose do you have other than judgment and destruction?”

Will’s brows pulled back, and his mouth pressed into a thin line. His gaze was stony as he said, “None, by all accounts.”

Hannibal slowly set down his glass, aware that whether his own words were true or not, the question had been badly phrased.

“Apologies,” he said, with a deep nod. “No offense was intended. Making a philosophical argument about you while you are seated at my table was in poor taste. We are no longer in the realm of philosophy.”

Will relaxed, his expression slipping back into something neutral as he said, “I imagine it’s a hard realm to escape when your profession revolves around the abstract.”

“Just so.”

Will nodded his head fractionally, then took a drink of wine, Hannibal's mistake apparently forgotten.

"I have revisited thoughts of God recently," Hannibal said, "in light of our conversations."

"And do you now paint God in a better or worse light?"

"A truer one." Hannibal brought his hands together. "You told me you have no taste for the blood of the innocent. That must mean that God does. What benevolence is to be found there?"

Will looked amused. "And you suppose God drops church roofs on his followers to satisfy such tastes?"

"You stated that your actions in the world are suggestions only. Can you say the same for God?"

Will was contemplative, seeming to collect his words before he spoke. "My experience with God is more intimate than yours."

"Of course," Hannibal said easily. "That is what makes this conversation so informative."

Will paused again. "God's action in the world is inaction." He picked up his wine glass, staring at it for along moment before he took a drink. "God is gone."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, the beginning of a smirk on his lips. "God is dead?"

"God has left," Will said, meeting Hannibal's eyes squarely. "In the beginning, God created a great cosmic machine. Then he stepped back and let it run. God's hand has not touched it since, nor has his voice been heard." Will paused. "There is only one truth about God: he's inscrutable, even to his servants."

Hannibal gave Will's words the weight they deserved, letting the echoes of them wash over him as he sipped his wine.

Setting the glass down, he asked, "Are you his servant?"

"I was, once."

"When did you stop?"

"When I began to feel more comfortable in Hell than in Heaven. When it was clear that I was alone in enjoying the violence that leaves screams smeared in the air."

Hannibal tilted his head. "Some texts say Hell was made for you."

"If it was, it's a poor prison," Will said wryly, bringing his glass to his lips. "It was made. I made it my own."

“Perhaps it was not made for you, but for you,” Hannibal said after a moment. “God is beyond measure in wanton malice and matchless in his irony.”

Will arched a brow. “Your point?”

“Perhaps you still serve God, perhaps he approves of all that you do. Yours is a necessary function.”

“Interesting,” Will commented.

“You’ve thought of it before.”

“I’ve thought of everything before,” Will said evenly. “I’ve had the time. In God’s absence, I have either become something other than what he made me, or I have become exactly what he made me.”

“When God abandoned his creation, he abandoned you as well,” Hannibal offered, regarding Will. “And so you betrayed God in return.”

“Betrayal requires intent. I simply stopped ignoring the urges I kept down for so long. I was reborn, the willful instrument of my own becoming.”

One corner of Hannibal’s mouth twitched. “If you can’t beat God, become him.”

Will laughed. “I have no desire to be God, nor do I fashion myself as such. I’ve never pretended to be anything other than what I am.” He paused for a long moment. “Everything that can happen happens. I happened. I would have happened in every possible world. I am,” he said, repeating words he’d uttered during their first conversation.

Hannibal stared at Will intently, captivated by the conversation. “You follow your own nature, exquisite in your understanding, beautiful in your cruelty.”

Something dark and pleased gleamed in Will’s eyes, and he inclined his head. “I know what I am, and I’m decided in what I do. Whether I defy or fulfill God’s intentions, my purpose is my own.”

Hannibal hesitated, before saying, “Then why did my earlier comment about your purpose bother you, if I may ask?”

“You said you had no assumptions where I was concerned. I was... unmoored to hear one.”

Hannibal nodded. “Again, my apologies. It was not meant as a reflection about you, rather, a conjecture on the mechanics of God.”

“It’s forgotten.”

Hannibal nodded again, then finished the last of his wine, a warm feeling spreading through him that had nothing to do with the alcohol. Something in him was elated that Will hadn’t been affronted by the words themselves, that he’d been taken aback simply because he hadn’t expected them from Hannibal, because he thought the two of them were beyond that.

“You are correct, of course,” Hannibal said, standing to pour them both more wine. “Our dialogue must be open, free of fixed ideas if we are to gain new understanding.”

Will smirked. “And what understanding have you gained tonight?”

“Much about God. If not his nature, then his actions. His nature, as ever, remains subject to our own construction.” Hannibal sat again. “If it is as you say, and God has left, then my interpretation of God is as true as yours. God’s design in letting his cosmic machine run itself does not preclude his enjoying church collapses.”

“I suppose it doesn’t,” Will said, amusement in his voice. “No thoughts on the nature of good and evil? Such ideas usually arise when speaking of God and the Devil.”

“Good and evil has nothing to do with God.”

“And with me?”

“You punish those who commit acts you deem monstrous. But you do not use such people to justify your own desires. Rather, you only find pleasure in taking blood if you’ve judged a person deserving of your attention. What of evil is to be seen there?” Hannibal took a sip of wine. Afterward, he said, “On the subject of punishment, have you given any thought to the question I posed at the end of our last conversation?”

“I have.” Will stared at him evenly, with a smile in his eyes that didn’t reach his mouth. “I’ve considered it fully.”

Hannibal waited with bated breath to hear the words, even though he could already feel the answer in the air between them. “And what is your conclusion, Will? Would you join me one night, share in the power of taking a life?”

“Yes.”

Will’s eyes never wavered from his, and Hannibal felt his pulse quicken in anticipation of what they were to share.

“I have two conditions,” Will said.

“Please.” Hannibal gestured for him to continue.

“It can’t be anyone I’ve made a deal with. It would be... bad form to make a deal for someone’s soul and then kill them myself so I can have it all the sooner.”

Hannibal nodded in acquiescence. “Bad form is always to be avoided. And your other condition?”

“As I said, I’m rarely the executioner. If I’m going to remove a life from this world, the blood I spill needs to be blood that unquestionably merits death at my hand.”

“A murderer,” Hannibal said.

“Yes. But not someone who merely killed a few times out of perceived necessity. Someone who revels in their art.” Will smiled crookedly, giving him an arch look. “Someone like you.”

“You want me to find you a serial killer.”

“Find me one and I’ll join you,” Will said coolly. “Until then, I remain in expectation.”

Hannibal paused, as if in consideration. Then he said, “I know just the man.”

Will was visibly surprised, his brow furrowing. “Did you anticipate this?”

“In a way, though probably not as you imagine. I suspected you might pose such a request, though of course you’re correct that this would normally not be enough time to fulfill it. But there have been a string of recent murders, the last just three days ago. I recognize the pathology. He was a former patient, and he more than fits your requirements.”

“Your kills are meticulous,” Will commented. “You wouldn’t consider it risky to kill someone you’ve been associated with?”

“He was my patient for a limited number of sessions nearly fifteen years ago. I’m confident no connection will be made.”

“Then it seems you have arranged everything to satisfaction. But I still reserve judgment until I see him.”

“That is most easily remedied,” Hannibal said. “Can you meet me tomorrow morning?”

Will raised his glass to the air, a playful smile on his lips. “It’s a date.”

Chapter 6

Hannibal strategically meandered through the early morning crowds at the Museum of Natural History, Will following along beside him.

Will had met him at the doors, amusement and curiosity on his face. But he joined Hannibal without comment, remaining silent until Hannibal arrived at their destination within. Hannibal stopped in front of a large dinosaur skeleton.

He looked up, studying the skeleton without giving it his real attention. “We call them bones, but they’re nothing more than rock, formed in the shape of what once was.”

“Are we here for a history lesson?” Will asked dryly.

“We’re here for a coincidental meeting so that you may pass judgment.” Hannibal looked at the skeleton again, considering it. “How correct are the current theories on evolution?”

Will gave a minuscule shrug. “Sixty-forty.”

“And they said God made Man in his image.”

“More or less.” Will’s mouth curved upward. “He just took the long way round.”

“I imagine you would be a fascinating tour guide, Will.”

“I imagine I would,” Will said, agreeing with his words while his voice said he had no interest in doing any such thing.

Hannibal smiled. “A passing fancy.”

He moved on, strolling without apparent purpose and looking at a few more skeletons while Will trailed behind him. Hannibal was pausing, pretending to read a plaque, when a voice spoke from behind him.

“Dr. Lecter?”

Hannibal turned, feigning confusion, then polite surprise.

“Randall,” Hannibal said, as if he had just placed the name. He smiled. “What a pleasure to see you.”

“It’s been a long time,” Randall said.

Hannibal quickly flicked his eyes over Randall’s coat. Beside him, Will was studying Randall without giving the appearance of doing so. “Do you work here?” Hannibal asked.

“I do. I put most of these together, actually.”

“Incredible work. We were just admiring it,” Hannibal said, gesturing to Will as he spoke. “It seems like a marvelous occupation.”

“It is,” Randall said. “It’s my calling. I always wanted to thank you for helping me find it, for what you said to me the first time I saw you.”

“And now you have,” Hannibal replied smoothly. “It’s wonderful to see you doing so well.”

Randall nodded and shook his hand, before he excused himself and returned to work.

Hannibal let the genial smile fall from his face as he returned his focus to the skeleton, the supposed reason he was here. After a moment, he glanced beside him to Will.

“Thoughts?” Hannibal queried.

Will met Hannibal’s gaze, satisfaction in his smile and dark anticipation in his eyes. “He’ll do.”

Three nights later, Hannibal was in his plastic suit, waiting alone inside Randall Tier’s darkened kitchen. The house was on a lonely road, situated next to a patch of woodland, making it perfect for its owner’s activities. Hannibal had already found Randall’s suit of bones and gears, having been unworn by their creator this night.

They would remain unworn after this, a monument to Randall’s identity and a testament for law enforcement to find.

There was a step on the tile, and then Will was beside him.

Hannibal glanced up. Will was wearing dark pants and a button down shirt with the sleeves already rolled up.

“Good evening, Will.” Hannibal stood.

“Evening,” Will said, his tone cool and pleasant. Then he paused, his head tilting slightly as his eyes slid sideways. “He’s returning from his walk. We can intercept him in the woods.”

“An ideal plan.”

“Did you bring anything?” Will asked.

“I planned to improvise.”

Will nodded. Then he looked around the kitchen, opening drawers until he found something suitable. He pulled out two long knives, testing them against his thumb and smirking in satisfaction when they drew blood.

Hannibal was captivated as Will brought his thumb to his mouth to suck away the blood. However, the action made another thought occur to him.

Will's attire was one thing, but his unconcern at getting his own blood on the murder weapon was another.

"I take it you do not have to worry about contaminating the scene," Hannibal said.

"Not at all." Will arched a brow, still smirking. "Like I said, I'm not limited." Then he gestured toward the back door. "Shall we?"

Hannibal smiled. "We shall."

The two of them exited the house and began walking into the woods. The air was still and cool around them, and the moon was nearly full, providing more than enough light. Hannibal felt a steady thrum of anticipation in his blood, and he relished the solid presence of Will in step with him.

In truth, Will was leading their steps, subtly guiding their direction, but Hannibal didn't doubt that Will knew exactly how to cross their path with Randall's. After a few more minutes, this was confirmed when the wind shifted and Hannibal picked up a subtle difference in the scent of the air.

Randall came into view in the distance, aimlessly weaving between trees as he made in the general direction of his house. He spotted the two of them shortly after, and Hannibal saw him start, but continue on in their direction. Randall was a predator, and he wouldn't shirk from confronting them.

When they were standing in a clearing within a few yards of each other, Randall stopped and assessed them. Hannibal knew there was nothing ambiguous about the picture they made—he in his plastic suit, Will holding two knives.

"Dr. Lecter," Randall said.

"Randall."

"I wondered about you sometimes, if you were like me at all. But you seemed too refined, too in control."

"I'm nothing like you, Randall," Hannibal said easily. "I am always fully in control."

"And I'm not. That was what you said to me: 'You will always be ruled by your fascination with teeth.'"

Hannibal paused in consideration. "And yet you've come so very far. You have made wonderful progress; I've seen what you've done."

"Then why are you here?"

"There are things more important than the life you clamor after. We all have our own savage needs," he said, glancing at Will.

Randall looked back and forth between the two of them, not in any way unclear about what Hannibal intended. He squared his shoulders. "I'm not going to make this easy for you."

"That will make it more enjoyable," Will said, speaking for the first time. "But it was always going to be easy."

Then he handed the knives to Hannibal and started walking. Will crossed the distance between himself and Randall, and stopped a few feet away.

Randall growled and lunged, striking out with a fist, but Will swiftly ducked, avoiding the blow and spinning to deliver a hit to Randall's back, sending him to the ground with his own momentum. Randall jumped to his feet and lashed out again. Will was faster, smashing his fist into Randall's nose, snapping the man's head to the side and drawing blood.

Hannibal began to walk closer, admiring the brutal ease of Will's movements.

Will struck Randall's face again, then again, and again, before delivering a pointed jab to his stomach that doubled the man over. He had a smile on his face as he walked around Randall in a slow circle, then kicked his knees out to send him sprawling on the ground.

Will immediately pulled him up with one hand fisted in his shirt, and struck his face two more times even as Randall clawed at him. The next punch sent Randall back to the ground, and Will delivered a kick to his midsection with enough force that he went rolling.

Randall didn't disappoint, however, and was on his feet ready to fight back a moment later, even though he didn't have a chance.

"Why me?" he rasped.

"We all follow our natures," Will replied. "Yours calls to mine."

Randall laughed, wet and thick. "Like an animal howl?"

"Like a harbinger."

Will glanced at Hannibal and held up a hand. Hannibal instantly understood and tossed Will a knife. Fifteen feet away, Will neatly plucked it out of the air, flipped it in his hand, and turned toward Randall.

Then he lunged, slicing Randall across the thigh before retreating again. Will caught Hannibal's gaze. Randall still stood between them, and Hannibal saw the beauty of it. He approached Randall from behind, Randall turning at the last moment to face him. Hannibal darted in quickly and stabbed him in the shoulder, earning a choked back scream. At the same time, Will moved in to jab the blade into his thigh. Randall swiped behind him, but missed by a wide margin, as Will had already moved away. Randall growled in frustration.

Hannibal and Will both retreated, circling, watching each other as much as watching Randall. Will smiled, satisfied and wolfish, blood on his hands and his knife dripping. Hannibal couldn't help the smile that spread over his own face in return. With a look passing between them, they began again.

He and Will moved in tandem, each attacking from a different side and piercing flesh with their blades. Will was playing with his prey, as he had been from the start, enjoying the act and drawing it out. He never once aimed for any spot that would have been fatal, so Hannibal did likewise. This kill would be Will's, whenever he chose to make it.

It was a bloody dance with a perfect partner, and Hannibal never once found himself out of step. They painted the ground black as the blood flowed, alternately attacking alone and moving as one.

Randall was still on his feet, but was long past the point of effectively fighting back. He merely grunted against the pain and refused to give in, an animal that wouldn't lie down until he was dead.

Hannibal gouged him again, his knife sliding in between two ribs from behind. Will took the opportunity to catch Randall from the front, a knife slipping through his rib cage and pinning him between them. Randall gave a true falter, his feet slipping out from under him, and Hannibal felt his weight press down on the knife.

"Hold him," Will said, eyes dark, smile sharp.

Hannibal obliged, hooking his other arm under Randall's and hauling him up by the shoulder.

Will removed his knife, and then stuck it into Randall's gut, once, twice, three times. Hannibal's heart sped up as he realized Will was about to make the kill, as he saw that he would be able to look straight into Will's eyes as Will did it.

Will twisted the knife and Randall lurched, near to losing consciousness. Then Will removed the blade, stood straight and tall, and drew it across Randall's neck.

Hannibal watched as if in slow motion as Will was bathed in arterial spray, staining his neck and turning his shirt to slick black. He couldn't remember ever seeing anything more beautiful.

The blood flow quickly faltered, Randall's body having nothing left to give. Hannibal put two fingers to his neck, and then dropped the body to the ground. He stepped to the side, his eyes still anchored on Will.

Will stared back at him, an expression of cool satisfaction on his face.

Hannibal took a breath, and the only truth he knew sprang to his lips. "I have never wanted anyone as much I want you in this moment, Will."

Will turned to face him, a slight raise to his eyebrow his only reaction. His hand almost imperceptibly flexed against the knife he still held, and for a moment, Hannibal thought Will might simply drive it into his heart. But he had no regrets, and would gladly welcome death if Will wished it.

The air between them almost seemed frozen. Will dropped the knife. The next second, Will was on him, grabbing Hannibal's head and pulling him into a rough kiss. It was more teeth

than lips, but Hannibal could taste the blood on Will's skin.

His own hands came up to pull Will closer, and he relished the feel of Will's teeth on him. Will tugged at the collar of Hannibal's suit and said, "This is in the way."

Hannibal nodded in agreement, ready to be well out of his suit. But sex was messy, and they were in the middle of a crime scene. "If you could ensure no evidence will be left—" he started.

"I have a better idea," Will said silkily.

That was all the warning Hannibal had before Will grabbed him tightly and he experienced vertigo. When he blinked again, they were standing in his bedroom.

Will stepped away from him, unruffled by the instant change in scenery. Hannibal took a moment more to get his footing.

"A useful trick," Hannibal said.

"And another," Will said, gesturing between them.

Hannibal realized that there was no blood left on either of them. He gave Will a questioning look, and Will simply shrugged and raised his brows. Then he began unbuttoning his shirt, reminding Hannibal of why they were here.

Hannibal divested himself of the plastic suit and began removing his other clothing. He smirked at Will. "I would have gladly had you with the blood, but I appreciate your not contaminating my home with evidence."

Will undid the buckle of his belt. "Next time I can clean up after, then." He shoved his pants and underpants down in one smooth motion, leaving him stark naked, his erection swaying as he moved in front of Hannibal.

Hannibal quickly stripped off the rest of his clothes, leaving them where they fell on the floor. He was already hard, but the sight of Will only made him ache more. "Is there going to be a next time?" he asked.

"I suppose we'll see," Will said. He gave Hannibal's shoulders a shove.

Hannibal fell back on the mattress as Will crawled on top of him. Will's cock brushed his and Hannibal opened his legs, allowing Will to settle between them. Will ground against him several times, looking gorgeously obscene in his movements.

Every rub of Will's cock was electric against his, and Hannibal was already panting. Will caught Hannibal's lower lip between his teeth, tugging gently before he delivered a sharper bite.

"I like it rough," Will said, his hand snaking beneath Hannibal and gripping his ass before a finger pushed at his hole. "I hope you do."

“Yes,” Hannibal said, nodding breathlessly.

Will rubbed at his entrance, his gaze full of lust and his smile crooked as he watched Hannibal react beneath him. His other hand found Hannibal’s knees, bending each one so that his legs fell wide open.

Hannibal blindly reached for the nightstand, opening the drawer and grabbing the bottle of lube. “Do we need condoms?”

A look of amusement flickered across Will’s face. “No.”

“Good. I want to feel you.”

“You’re going to feel nothing but me.” Will took the lube from him and sat back on his heels, applying a generous amount to his cock before capping the bottle. Then he wiped his hand on his thigh and grabbed Hannibal’s hips, pulling him into position.

Hannibal felt the slick head of Will’s cock press against his hole. Will adjusted himself and the pressure increased, beginning a slow breach. Then he licked his lips and shoved in, bottoming out in one sharp, violent thrust.

Hannibal gasped at the burning stretch of it, trying to adjust to the sudden girth that filled him. But Will was already moving, pulling out then snapping his hips forward and pushing just as deep. Bliss was clear in his face as he gripped Hannibal’s legs and set a steady rhythm, slamming his length into Hannibal again and again.

Will was satisfyingly brutal, the lube only barely easing his way into Hannibal’s unprepared body. Will fucked as he pleased, chasing his own pleasure and forcing Hannibal to accommodate him. But then Will’s cock began to brush Hannibal’s prostate, and pain and pleasure started to merge. Hannibal arched into it, searching out the feeling and squeezing Will with his thighs.

Will bent over him, bringing their chests closer and changing the angle. Hannibal shifted his legs up to Will’s sides, throwing one loosely around his middle. His own pleasure was building now, and he moved beneath Will, meeting his thrusts and seeking friction against his own erection. Hannibal started to reach for himself, but Will caught his hand. He pinned Hannibal’s arms beside his head with a strength that wasn’t surprising as he continued to pound into him. Will seemed to take up the whole space above him, and there was no sound in the room besides panting breaths and the wet slap of their bodies.

Then Will lowered himself fully down on Hannibal, trapping his cock firmly between them. Will turned his head to the side, running his teeth down Hannibal’s neck before he pressed his forehead to Hannibal’s shoulder. His thrusts became even harder, and every time he moved, his stomach rubbed Hannibal’s cock with the harsh slide of skin on skin.

Hannibal pushed back against him and brought his other leg over Will, relishing the heat of Will inside him. The penetration was fully pleasurable now, and he was close to coming from it alone. He tried to shift his arms, solely so he could feel the pressure of them being held down. Will didn’t disappoint, his grip growing firmer as he fucked Hannibal to the mattress.

“I could take you apart,” Will said, voice breathy and rough, “piece by piece...” He began to punctuate his words with piercing thrusts. “...carve you until you were nothing, then put you back together...”

He was driving into Hannibal viciously now. “...just so I could have the pleasure of doing it all again.”

Hannibal was harder than ever at the words, and Will’s breath was ragged in his ear.

“And you would *beg* me to do it again.”

Hannibal came. Hard.

His orgasm seemed to never end; he felt suspended as he spilled between them and clenched around Will, his hole clamping down as muscles contracted.

Will shoved in as deep as he could go, his cock twitching as he was pushed over the edge by the sudden tightness around him. Will groaned, and Hannibal felt him coming, Will’s release shooting deep inside him in long, hot spurts.

Will gave a final thrust, spending himself with a moan. Then his body relaxed, his hands loosening, his head dropping, and his weight resting on Hannibal.

Hannibal unwrapped his own legs from Will’s waist, letting them fall open and straight. Will’s cock was dislodged from him, and it slid out, soft and slippery. Will showed no signs of getting off him, and Hannibal was pleased to remain as they were. He was sated and exhausted, and Will’s weight was a pleasant reminder of all that had just occurred.

His own heart rate was still elevated, and he could feel Will’s rapid heartbeat against his chest. “So what do you say, Will?” he asked, his voice loose and low. “Is there going to be a next time?”

Will smiled against his shoulder, slow but full of teeth. “Oh, yes.”

Chapter 7

Hannibal woke early, as was his habit. He was alone, which wasn't wholly unexpected. The comforter had been haphazardly pulled over him, part of it falling into the floor. He still slept on top of it, right where he had lain with Will.

Hannibal remembered the moments afterward, Will sliding off him and rolling slightly to the side, their limbs still halfway entangled. Neither of them had moved after that, and Hannibal had uncharacteristically fallen asleep exactly where he lay.

Will had obviously left sometime in the night. Hannibal knew without even checking that Will was nowhere in the house.

He slipped out of bed, feeling a reminder of the previous night in the form of a persistent yet pleasant soreness. Will had been more than rough, and while Hannibal showered, he idly fantasized about the pain and pleasure he could have experienced had Will been here to continue their liaison.

After drying off, Hannibal put on a pair of silk pajamas and a robe. The house was cool, and he lit the fire that was already laid in the living room fireplace before making his coffee and fixing a quick but satisfying breakfast of sausage and eggs.

A light snow was beginning to fall, and Hannibal was just finishing up in the kitchen when he received an unexpected, though not unwelcome, call from Mischa. It was lunchtime in Italy, but Mischa knew of his early hours, and they often spoke in the morning before his daily obligations started.

Hannibal poured another cup of coffee and retreated to an armchair in front of the fireplace to finish the call.

He and Mischa had a pleasant conversation, first in Italian before they switched to Lithuanian. Mischa told him of plays she had recently seen, and Hannibal spoke about the opera he had attended. Their discussion was idle and easy, genuine even though the topics were not personal. Only when Mischa noted that he was in particularly good humor did Hannibal find himself mentioning that there was someone new in his life.

Mischa didn't press him for details and Hannibal didn't give any, as was their way. Their conversation continued for a few more minutes before they exchanged goodbyes and Hannibal ended the call.

He had sensed Will behind him for several moments now. Will's footsteps broke the silence as he drew near the fireplace and took the other chair in front of it. He was fully dressed, and wearing a dark sweater with a jacket over it.

"Hello, Will." Hannibal's lips twitched in the beginnings of a smile. Setting aside the previous night, when Will had brought them both, this was the first time Will had appeared inside his house, instead of at the door. "I didn't hear you come in."

Will smirked. "Should I have rung the bell?"

"Not at all. My home is your home." Hannibal glanced towards the fire, then Will, the light from the flames dancing over his face in the dimly lit room. Apropos of nothing, Hannibal said, "The dichotomy between solitude and companionship has always been a rigid one. It's a curious sensation to have the edges so indistinct."

"And how do you find it?"

Hannibal gave the question the appropriate consideration. "The abstract idea of a companion who can appear out of thin air is objectionable. One might feel the loss of their privacy or routine." Hannibal's eyes slid to Will. "But I find myself having no such complaints, merely musings on the concept. Your presence is always to be desired."

Will regarded him thoughtfully.

"May I offer you a cup of coffee?" Hannibal asked.

"No, thank you." Will's eyes drifted to the window and the snow falling beyond it. "I didn't want to interrupt your conversation."

Hannibal nodded, though he couldn't help pushing Will with, "But you listened to it."

"I was curious," Will said. "Your relationship with your sister is singular."

"I don't disagree, but I'm curious in what ways you find it so?"

Will brought his hands together. "She's the only person in your life you don't play games with, the only risk that you deem unacceptable."

"She is too valuable to play games with," Hannibal said. "I once stood in a world without her in it. I don't wish to experience that world again." He tilted his head, looking at Will meaningfully. "Though you are incorrect that she is the only person I do not play games with."

Will's eyebrows raised. "You wouldn't call this a game?"

Hannibal gave a minuscule shake of his head. "Not in the sense you mean. It is true I often manipulate events for my own amusement, but I would not hazard such an agenda with you."

Will chuckled. "Even your hubris doesn't extend that far?"

"What manipulation is there to be had with a being who can see into the souls of Man?" Hannibal said easily. "It would be an insult to us both to even make the attempt. And an honest discourse with you was far more intriguing than any game I could imagine." He paused, then added, "Though I have always been aware that you could be playing one with me."

"I grew bored of such games a long time ago," Will said dully. "It would be pointless to feign such interest."

Hannibal smiled. "Then we are both fine company for each other."

"If our exchange is not a game, how would you categorize it?"

"A proposition," Hannibal said smoothly.

One corner of Will's mouth turned up in a sharp smirk. He held Hannibal's gaze for a moment more, before he looked at the fire and settled back in his chair.

"I'm curious," Hannibal said, "did you hear my mentioning you to Mischa?"

"I didn't, actually. What did you say?"

"That I had met someone much like myself, and for the first time in a long while, I saw the possibility of a true companion."

Will didn't comment on that one way or the other. Instead, he returned to the topic of Mischa.

"You take a great deal of care of her."

"She wants for nothing, but it would be incorrect to say that I provide for her," Hannibal said. "Half of the family estate belongs to her. I've encouraged her to use it to construct whatever life she desires."

"Are the two of you close?"

"In some ways we are close, in others, distant. She has never left Europe." Hannibal paused, the silence filled with the crackling of the fire. After another moment, he said, "You asked me once if I ever longed to see the beauty of her death. I now know that you yourself would find no beauty in it, so why describe it so?"

"That's how it would be seen through your eyes," Will said.

"Perhaps," Hannibal allowed. "Death is always beautiful." Mischa's death would no doubt be beautiful at his hand, but that did not mean he wanted it to occur. "Most of what we do, most of what we believe, is motivated by death. Death is what makes life precious."

"Her life is more precious to you than any other."

"A place for her was made in my world," Hannibal said. "I would not undo it. Nor would I discard that which I had so dearly purchased."

Will gave him a measured look. "It must have occurred to you, sometime over the years, that you would have been mine anyway, devil's bargain notwithstanding."

"I have considered it at various points. What is the Devil without Hell; what is Hell without the souls of the wicked? In that light, I lost nothing and gained Mischa in return. But the same cannot be said for you." Hannibal regarded Will evenly. "You saw me then as you see me now. Why make a bargain for something that was destined to be yours?"

“I was curious. Curious what you would do, curious what you would destroy, curious if our encounter would drive you in any way. Yet you became what you were always going to become regardless of my actions. You would be surprised how often that’s not the case.”

Hannibal reflected on the implications of that last statement. “I imagine in most cases, you would find it pointless to make deals for souls already yours. Is there truth, then, to the temptations of the Devil?”

“My interference is not so direct. I offer pacts and demand a soul. There are no other conditions.” Will raised an eyebrow pointedly. “And yet most of those I treat with still become deserving of my attention.”

“They embrace malice because they assume they have nothing left to lose,” Hannibal surmised. He watched Will closely, intrigued by the further glimpses of Will’s nature. “Is that true, Will? Do they have nothing left to lose?”

Will’s smile was slow but satisfied. “I never lie, and I choose my words carefully. Souls are given ‘to do with as I please.’ I have no interest in the undeserving. If a person does nothing in their lifetime to deserve my hand, I release them. I have no use for those whose worst act was selling me their soul.”

Hannibal absently ran his fingers along the arm of his chair, fascinated. “Who would expect mercy from the Devil?”

“Who indeed?” Will returned.

“What outcome do you hope for?” Hannibal asked. “That they become deserving of your attention or that they do not?”

“Humanity is cruel, crueler than I could ever be.”

“And you revel in that cruelty.”

“I do. But I am occasionally gratified when I am denied, and I see instead the potential God saw. I have no interest in it, but I can appreciate it.”

Hannibal nodded, considering the ways in which Will’s methods were not dissimilar to his own. He often had desired endings to the games he played, but he enjoyed having his expectations overturned as well.

“Then it seems that if one has the moral fortitude,” Hannibal said after a beat, “one may get a miracle from the Devil free of charge.”

“Call it my own peculiar brand of empathy.” Will smirked, looking back at the fire. “Such events are the exception, not the rule.”

“If only the rules to the game were known,” Hannibal said with a smile.

“If only,” Will echoed.

An easy silence fell between them then. Hannibal glanced in the direction of the window, outside which snow was starting to fall in earnest. The fire was beginning to lessen, and Hannibal stood, adding another small log to it while Will watched him.

As he sat again, Will spoke.

“Even those I take,” he said, “I release eventually.”

Hannibal peered at Will with interest. “Do you consider their punishments fulfilled?”

Will turned his head, catching Hannibal’s gaze. “I consider myself fulfilled,” he said smoothly. “There is only so much to be done to a person. After a certain point, there is nothing left to enjoy, nothing worth reveling in.”

Hannibal himself could appreciate the thought of killing someone in a multitude of ways, and there were those who he would have delighted in killing more than once. But he could also imagine the eventual tedium of only being able to kill those people again and again.

“Once you have exhausted possibilities,” Hannibal said, “repetition becomes unappetizing. A person can only fall apart in so many ways, physically or mentally.” He paused. “How do you decide when to release them?”

“When I get bored,” Will said simply. One corner of his mouth crooked up. “Some keep my interest for ages. But they all go, in the end.”

Hannibal’s brows raised in interest. “Are the wicked allowed into Heaven, then?”

“That’s up to those who control the gates of Heaven,” Will said. “It’s no concern of mine.”

Hannibal’s lips twitched, the barest hint of a smirk forming. “Theologians have debated such questions for centuries. And here the answer lies in whimsy and disorder.”

An amused expression flickered over Will’s face. “You find that fitting.”

“This world is full of uncertainty and chance; why should the next be any different? It is an ancient truth that mankind existed at the whims of the gods. Our ancestors knew this, even if we have forgotten it.”

Will gave him a sideways look. “And how will you find it, being subject to my whims?” He held Hannibal’s gaze, curiosity dark in his eyes.

Hannibal tilted his head, then asked, “When do you imagine those whims will lead you to dispense with me?”

Will smiled, slow and sharp, as the fire crackled between them. “You,” he said, “I’d keep forever.”

Chapter 8

Will joined him for dinner the next two evenings. Hannibal briefly regretted that he hadn't obtained any organs from Randall for them to share, but he and Will had been busy with other things in the immediate moments afterward, which was an outcome he hadn't been disappointed by in the least.

Hannibal enjoyed Will's company in any capacity, but he also looked forward to their next more intimate encounter. When an opportune moment presented itself, he would make another overture. Or perhaps Will would this time; either way, Hannibal was pleased to wait and see what occurred.

What occurred on the third night was Will sliding into the space behind him as he poured a glass of wine. Hannibal heard him get up from the chair in front of the fireplace, felt him inches away from his back.

Hannibal set the wine glass down. Without turning his head, he asked, "Would you like a glass, Will?"

"No." Will's breath was hot on the back of his neck.

Hannibal's pulse quickened, and he could already feel himself starting to get hard.

"I'd like something else, though," Will said.

Hannibal turned around, not diminishing their proximity any, and stared directly into Will's eyes. Will leaned forward even farther, putting a hand on the table on either side of Hannibal, caging him with his body.

Hannibal made the next movement, brushing his lips to Will's. But he barely got a taste of him before Will pulled back, one corner of his mouth turning up.

"You tease me, Will."

"Oh, I'm going to do more than that."

"Shall we take this upstairs?" Hannibal asked. He was more than pleased at the turn of tonight's events and was quite ready to proceed with them further.

Will gave him a cool look. "I was thinking downstairs. You have chains in the basement, I believe." His brows raised, a question and an invitation.

"Do you want to have me at your mercy, Will?" Hannibal's tongue darted between his lips at the thought. "You have that already."

"What I want is to fuck you in a very specific way. I want to string you up and take my pleasure." Will's gaze was heated, and his hand slid between Hannibal's legs, where there

was a clear bulge. “But unless I miss my guess, it’s a pleasure we would share.”

Hannibal’s blood was racing at the thought of all the things Will could do to him, all the things he wanted Will to do to him. He pressed into Will’s hand. “It would be a savage pleasure, one I would entirely welcome.”

Will’s lips brushed his in a tease of a kiss. “Then we should relocate.” He squeezed Hannibal harshly, before moving away.

Will was already en route to the kitchen, and Hannibal moved after him. Will glanced back over his shoulder, giving him a hungry look. Hannibal’s breath caught at the sight of it.

Once in the kitchen, Hannibal said, “The trapdoor is through there.”

Will nodded, pausing in the pantry doorframe. He ran a finger down the woodwork. “Bring a knife.” His voice was low and rough.

Hannibal felt his own arousal spike at the order. He wet his lips as he pulled an eight-inch blade from the block. Smooth and sleek like all his knives, it fit perfectly in his hand.

He knew it wouldn’t be used in his hand tonight.

Will had opened the trapdoor and was making his way down the stairs. Hannibal followed, anticipation thrumming through him. He felt every inch the predator about to strike, even as he knew he was the one about to be set upon.

Hannibal closed the door above him, as was his habit. Will was standing a short distance away, taking in the steel and concrete, the plastic sheeting, and the chains. He moved to pull on one set that had manacles attached, adjusting their length with practiced ease.

“Will it suit?” Hannibal asked, coming up next to him.

“It will suit,” Will said, a smile in his voice. He held out his hand expectantly; Hannibal placed the knife in it.

Will’s fingers curved around the handle, and he slowly brought the point of the knife to rest under Hannibal’s chin. He met Hannibal’s eyes, his gaze hooded. Never breaking eye contact, Will applied the barest pressure with the blade. Hannibal followed the way it pointed, moving until he was standing directly beneath the manacles.

Will brought the knife away slowly. Without looking down, he threaded it behind his belt at the jut of his hip. The handle caught against the belt and the blade gleamed beneath it; the easiness of the motion starkly reminded Hannibal of how magnificent Will had been the night they’d killed together.

Will licked his lips. Then he fisted his hand in Hannibal’s tie and pulled him into a rough kiss that ended in a bite. Hannibal pressed forward for more, but Will leaned away.

He unwrapped his hand from Hannibal’s tie and moved to undo the knot. Hannibal found himself as incapable of moving as if he were already restrained. Will made quick work of the

tie and tossed it behind him. He was wordless as he began unbuttoning Hannibal's waistcoat, before moving on to his shirt. His movements were patient but necessary, as if he were savoring unwrapping a present.

Hannibal's breath hitched as Will's fingers brushed his bare chest. He found something just as savory about being undressed like this. Will untucked the shirt from Hannibal's pants and then slowly peeled it from his body, before discarding it to the side.

Hannibal was now completely hard, his cock straining against his pants. Will gave him a wicked smirk as he cupped him, his hand lingering only briefly. He knelt, but moved farther down, reaching to unlace Hannibal's shoes. Hannibal lifted one foot and then the other in cooperation as Will stripped his feet bare.

Then Will stood, his gaze nothing but lustful as his eyes met Hannibal's. He gave a forceful tug on Hannibal's belt, causing Hannibal to stumble half a step towards him. Without looking down, Will began to roughly undo the buckle before slipping the belt out and casting it to the floor. His fingers were deft as he unbuttoned Hannibal's fly and pulled down the zipper, knuckles skimming the heated material below.

Hannibal stepped out of the pants pooled at his feet one leg at a time and then kicked them away. Without ceremony, Will stuck a hand down the front of Hannibal's underwear, drawing a ragged gasp from him.

"Arms up," Will commanded.

Hannibal complied instantly. Will's hands trailed around Hannibal's body as he moved behind him, fastening one manacle and then the other. Once they were secure, Will moved away, pulling on the chain to stretch Hannibal's arms fully over his head.

Hannibal's body was taught, and he exhaled heavily, awaiting anything it pleased Will to do. When Will circled back around him, he was barefoot and was slowly unbuttoning his own shirt. He tossed it aside, but made no move to undo his pants, even though his own arousal was evident.

Instead, he pulled the knife from his belt.

Hannibal watched in anticipation as Will drew nearer, his fingers curling loosely around the handle of the blade.

Will moved to Hannibal's side, putting himself close enough that his erection pressed into Hannibal's hip. Hannibal glanced at Will, but the sudden press of the blade to his neck froze him in place, his breath coming out in a sharp stutter.

Will met his gaze, his eyes dark and heated.

Hannibal swallowed, purposefully pressing back against the knife. "Are you going to cut my throat, Will?"

“I’ve always found something enticing about the neck,” Will said, his eyes dropping to consider the blade and the skin it pressed into. “It seems a decided design flaw, that something so vulnerable should be so exposed.”

He traced the tip of the knife around to the other side of Hannibal’s neck, the slow drag teasing the skin, but not cutting it. Will moved in front of him, breaking his contact with Hannibal’s hip as he adjusted the position of the knife to bring the cutting edge to rest just under Hannibal’s jaw.

Hannibal’s breath left him when he felt the cold steel slice his skin. The cut wasn’t deep or long, but it was enough to freely bleed. A warm wetness slowly began to trickle down his throat, drop by drop.

Then Will was there, dragging his tongue up Hannibal’s neck and licking the blood away in one long swipe. His lips immediately moved to Hannibal’s, and Hannibal leaned into it, desperate for the taste of blood on Will’s lips. Will’s hips were flush with his, and the push of Will’s erection against was almost enough to make him come. He was more aroused than he could ever remember being, even though Will had barely touched him.

Will broke the kiss, but not the contact of their hips, as he brought the knife up again. He raised Hannibal’s chin with it as he rubbed his cock on Hannibal through his pants. Hannibal licked his lips as he closed his eyes, lost in the feeling of Will rutting against him. Will continued to slowly gyrate his hips as he made another cut on Hannibal’s neck, pressing his mouth to it as it began to bleed.

Hannibal felt suspended, poised on the edge of Will’s knife and hovering at the edge of pleasure. Will tasted his blood once more before he took a step back, satisfaction in his smile and lust in his gaze.

“Blood is a good color on you,” Will said.

“You’ve seen that already.”

“I have,” Will said, idly tracing the knife over Hannibal’s chest. “But it being your own blood improves upon the experience further.”

The knife hovered over his left pectoral, and with a sharp flick of his wrist, Will made a cut halfway across it. It was deeper than the others and had a sharp sting to it. Blood immediately flowed, dripping down his chest in a slow but steady stream.

Will made no move to taste him this time, apparently content to simply watch the blood paint a pattern across his skin.

Hannibal’s lips twisted in the shadow of a smile. He let himself feel the constraints that kept his arms in place and he met Will’s eyes evenly. “Is this how we’ll spend our time in Hell, Will?”

Will slowly tilted his head, a sly smirk settling over his face as he held Hannibal’s gaze. “Do you think I still mean to torture you in Hell?”

“I would never presume otherwise,” Hannibal said. “Why should you not be capable of enjoying my company now while still dispensing your judgment later? I find no great contradiction there.”

“I’m more than capable, but I’ve had new thoughts on the subject.”

“Indeed?”

Will casually fingered the knife. “To know, and to be known, is a rare gift. Your destruction would be satisfying, perhaps, but it would be a hollow pleasure, in the end.”

He traced the knife down Hannibal’s stomach, before bringing it to hover over his cock, which strained against the material of his boxer-briefs. Will gave a sharp smile, looking up at Hannibal from under his lashes. “We can do this in Hell if you like, but only if one of us has an itch to scratch.”

With that, Will ever so slowly drew the tip of the knife down the length of Hannibal’s cock. There wasn’t enough force exerted to cut the material, only enough for Hannibal to feel the pointed pressure of the blade, the suggestion of what it could do.

Hannibal’s heart sped up as his arousal spiked once more. “And you would find no contradiction of your own principles or desires? Feel no obligation to punish me as you have all others who deserved your hand?”

Will smirked and raised his brows. “The main benefit of being the Devil is that you can do whatever the hell you want. And I’ve decided that I’d rather have you like this than in pieces.” He brought the point of the blade to press against the cloth at the very tip of Hannibal’s cock.

Hannibal’s breath was ragged. “If you think I’m not coming to pieces, you’re mistaken.”

Will chuckled, giving Hannibal’s erection a final flick with the flat of the knife. Then he pressed their bodies flush, catching Hannibal’s mouth with his. The move brought their chests together, Hannibal’s blood smearing between them.

Hannibal bit at Will’s lip. “You can have me any way you want,” he gasped, “like this or in pieces, I’m yours.”

“Would you have me be yours?” Will said between breaths.

Hannibal exhaled. “Only if you would have it. The power differential between us will always fall in your favor. I could no sooner claim you than I could the sun.”

“I am what I am,” Will said, lips brushing the corner of Hannibal’s mouth. “And what I would have is you by my side for eternity.”

“Yes.” Hannibal said the word into Will’s mouth. “Yes.”

Will broke the kiss and adjusted his grip on the knife. Looking down, he slid the blade flat against Hannibal’s hip, putting it between his skin and his underwear. With one clean

movement to the side, the knife neatly sliced the material, freeing Hannibal's erection and leaving him bare.

Will moved behind him, and Hannibal heard the knife clatter to the concrete floor. The next sound he heard was the clink of Will's belt buckle being undone, followed by his pants being unzipped. There was a rustling of cloth, and then Will's naked body was pressed to his back, his cock slotting against Hannibal's ass.

"You're going to come before I even fuck you," Will said in his ear.

Hannibal heard the flick of a plastic cap, and then there was nothing but two slick fingers pushing into him. Will found his prostate almost immediately, and began a targeted assault that had Hannibal quickly panting and gasping. Will's touch seemed the only thing that existed, and Hannibal was deliciously powerless to do anything but receive it.

Hannibal had been hovering at the edge of orgasm since Will had brought out the knife, and he knew he wasn't going to last long. The only point of contact Will made with him was the fingers buried inside him, but it was more than enough.

When Will curved his fingers and rubbed quickly before pressing hard, Hannibal came—his strained cock shooting his release straight in front of him in one long spurt that seemed obscene in how far away it hit the floor.

Will made an appreciative noise, and he pressed his lips against the back of Hannibal's neck. Then he removed his fingers, quickly replacing them with them with his cock.

Hannibal's muscles were loose from coming, but that still didn't prepare him for the first shove of Will inside him. Will stretched him wide and deep, and the friction of sliding flesh against nerves that were still tingling was both relief and torment. Every thrust of Will's cock was heightened by Hannibal's state, as well as by his inability to do anything but take whatever Will gave.

Will pressed himself against Hannibal's back, one hand gripping his hip while the other roamed over his body. Will ran his right hand up Hannibal's side, then halfway up his suspended arm before coming back down to wrap around Hannibal's shoulder from behind. He kept up a steady, brutal rhythm, and the chains were starting to rattle at each thrust as Hannibal's body shook in turn.

Almost impossibly, Hannibal found himself beginning to get hard again. Will noticed, and the hand at Hannibal's hip snaked around to grab his cock. Will roughly stroked Hannibal in time with his fucking, but only long enough for him to become erect. Then both of Will's hands moved to Hannibal's hips with a grip that would bruise as he slammed into him with new force. Each thrust drove Hannibal forward, and even with Will's hands holding him in place, soon his back was arched against the pull of the manacles as Will stretched his body to the limit.

Hannibal rolled his head back, mouth falling open in ecstasy. He was balanced on the edge of pain while pleasure built inside him, and he imagined what it would be like to die like this. Will's breath was harsh behind him, his movements becoming more erratic as he neared

completion. Will shoved in as deep as he could go, pulling Hannibal to him as he came with a groan. Hannibal felt the hot bursts within him as Will thoroughly emptied himself, his hips twitching with small movements as if he could get further inside than he already was.

Will rested his face against Hannibal's shoulder, his mouth open and his breath hot. He stayed inside Hannibal until he was fully soft. When he pulled out, he still remained draped over Hannibal's back.

Will's hands slid up Hannibal's arms; when Will reached his wrists, he traced his fingers over the manacles. He didn't ask where the keys were. He simply touched the manacles and they opened, chains swinging loose.

Hannibal let his arms fall to his side. He took a half-step forward—enough to relieve the pressure of the position he had been maintaining, but not enough to dislodge Will.

Hannibal brought one of his hands to cover Will's at his thigh. "Anytime you wish to take your pleasure, Will," he breathed, "it would be my pleasure."

"Do you like being helpless?" Will said against his shoulder.

"You truly know me, see me," Hannibal said. "It is freeing, and arousing, to succumb in such a scenario. I confess, in other scenarios, I have entirely avoided restraints, neither using them nor having them used on me."

"Controlling every aspect of your life is what's kept you undetected for so long." Will slowly moved, detaching himself from Hannibal and coming to stand in front of him. "But you also wouldn't want to draw attention to the fact that you're in control by entering into a situation where your control is obvious."

"Correct."

"You wouldn't need restraints, to always have total power over the other person in the room." A slow smile spread over Will's face. "You would know it, even if they didn't."

Hannibal licked his lips. "That is true."

Will coolly arched a brow. "Have you ever fantasized about killing someone during sex?"

"I've never had sex with any of my victims."

"That's not what I asked." Will's smirk was sharp and his eyes were dark. He took another step forward, pressing their groins together, Hannibal's erect cock rubbing Will's soft one. Their faces were inches apart, almost breathing each other's air.

"When you take someone to bed," Will said, "when they're beneath you, haven't you ever thought about how easy it would be to strangle the life out of them? How it would feel to have them convulse around you, for you to be the last thing they ever know?"

Hannibal swallowed. "Yes."

“Would you like to do it?” Will’s brows raised, a clear invitation.

Hannibal’s breath stopped. He was unsure exactly how Will pictured this playing out, but he was more than interested in the possibilities.

“And that which you describe?” he asked after a moment. “Is that what you imagine I will enjoy, or is it a reflection of your own desires?”

“Yes,” Will said simply. “It’s been a while since I saw someone I’d like to be fucked by, but I would relish the feel of you inside me.” He smirked as he added, “You can’t actually kill me, of course, but we can both have a good time.”

“You wish to engage in a scenario, then?”

“Not exactly. I can’t be killed, so nothing about it needs to be fake.”

Will met Hannibal’s eyes dead on, and Hannibal’s heart skipped a beat as he realized exactly what Will meant.

Will’s lips quirked. “What animates me is not the same as what animates you. If I don’t wish to be hurt, I won’t be. But if I do, then I’ll feel it all,” he said, drawing the words out in a purr, “and I want to feel everything you can give. Violence can be pleasurable when done correctly, and something tells me you can execute it to perfection.”

The words went straight to Hannibal’s cock. “I can,” he said. What Will was proposing had his blood racing, the idea of it so much more intense than anything he’d imagined.

Will held his gaze, his expression smooth and expectant. “So fuck me to death.”

Hannibal was on him the next instant, grabbing Will by the shoulders and propelling him backwards. He pushed him until the back of Will’s legs hit the industrial stainless steel table in the middle of the room.

Hannibal shoved him down on it, something inside him thrilling when Will went without resistance. He considered fucking Will while standing, but rejected the idea, wanting this to be as intimate as possible. Hannibal climbed up on the table himself, hooking one arm under Will’s waist and dragging him up it, unconcerned with the resistance of flesh sliding on metal.

Will was on his back beneath him, legs already partway spread. Hannibal grew even harder at the sight. The fact that he would soon be inside Will was overwhelming, but the freedom of keeping nothing back indescribable.

Hannibal had not always held back physically with previous partners—some had liked being fucked hard—but he had always kept part of himself carefully in check, never letting the mask fall even in intimate situations. But there had never been anything to keep from Will.

Hannibal used a knee to make space for himself between Will’s legs as he moved into position. Will watched Hannibal in anticipation, then smirked, glancing towards his own hand. There was a bottle of lube grasped between his fingers that hadn’t been there a moment

ago. Undoubtedly it was the same bottle Will had produced earlier; Hannibal also recognized it as the one from his own bedside table. He briefly considered taking Will with nothing to ease the way—if Will wanted pain, dry sex would certainly suffice. But he dismissed the idea, too impatient to feel Will around him to want to truly work at getting inside him.

Hannibal yanked Will's knees up, fully opening his legs and exposing his hole. He took the lube and spread it over himself, before dropping the bottle to the floor.

Hannibal lined himself up at Will's entrance, rubbing the tip of his cock back and forth before he pushed the head in. As he sank deeper, he folded himself over Will, bringing as much of their skin together as possible. Will was tight and hot around him, and Hannibal savored the feel of being surrounded as he seated himself fully.

Will hooked his feet around Hannibal's thighs, his hands clutching at Hannibal's shoulders, and Hannibal started to move. He began at a leisurely pace for his own enjoyment, relishing the sensation of Will's rim stretching around the length of his cock. But the desire to fuck Will roughly was too much to resist for long, and Hannibal braced himself more firmly on his elbows as he started to drive into Will faster and harder.

Will responded to the thrusts, his legs jerking and his cock starting to harden against Hannibal's stomach. One of Will's hands found his and moved it to rest against his neck. Hannibal took the cue, curling his fingers firmly around Will's throat, even as he had his head tucked to Will's shoulder.

He squeezed.

There was a satisfying sputter as Will's airway closed. Hannibal maintained the pressure for several seconds before he released his grasp and Will inhaled. He thrust several more times before he repeated the process, clenching Will's neck in a bruising grip.

Will's breath hitched again, and his body trembled against Hannibal's in a way that was far from disagreeable. Hannibal drove into him viciously, his hand still an anchor on Will's throat.

He uncurled his fingers more slowly this time, appreciating the way Will's airway opened under his touch. Removing his hand completely, Hannibal changed his position, lifting himself off Will's chest and straightening his arms to support his new angle.

Will was pliant beneath him as Hannibal started to slam into him again, his body ready and expectant. Will was nearly hard again, and one of his hands drifted to stroke his cock. His mouth was open in a loose but satisfied smile, and he urged Hannibal on with a clench of his muscles.

Hannibal felt the edge of his own orgasm building, and he brought both hands around Will's neck. Will's lips twitched in anticipation, and Hannibal dug his fingers in.

He had the weight of his body behind him in this position, and he pinned Will by the throat, expertly pressing to cut off blood flow as well as air supply. Will made a wounded noise, but his hand continued to stroke his cock throughout, and his eyes never left Hannibal's.

Hannibal felt feral, lost in the sensations of burying himself inside someone while holding life and death at his fingertips. The fact that it wasn't true death didn't make it any less exhilarating.

Will might not die, but Hannibal was going to kill him.

Hannibal relaxed his grip slightly, just enough to let a small amount of oxygen slip by. The veins on his hands stood out from the continuous force he was applying, and his own harsh breaths starkly contrasted with the complete absence of Will's. He could feel Will's flesh strain under his fingers, feel his pulse desperately pounding. He could also feel how close Will was to coming, as the movements of Will's hand on his cock became more desperate.

Clenching his fingers again, Hannibal exerted enough pressure for Will to begin to lose consciousness, to hover on the edge. Will was suspended underneath his hands, suspended on his cock. His eyes were still locked on Hannibal's, even as they started to flutter closed. Hannibal snapped his hips back, delivering three brutal thrusts in quick succession, and Will came.

Hannibal continued to slam into the muscles contracting around him, close to his own release. He tightened his hold on Will's neck, squeezing with everything he had as he began to lose himself. Will shuddered against him, limbs twitching and jerking, body thrashing in the throes of death. His hole constricted tightly, and Hannibal emptied himself with a moan that was almost a cry, coming harder than he had in his life.

He felt the moment that Will went still beneath him, around him, just as he himself pumped out the last few drops and was finally spent. Hannibal released his hands, marveling at the pattern on Will's neck before he fully collapsed on top of him, panting in exertion.

It was curious, lying on a body that didn't have breath or a heartbeat—neither particularly agreeable nor disagreeable. Hannibal had never entertained fantasies of necrophilia, but he hadn't been able to deny the appeal of climaxing while taking the life of his partner. It had always been an abstract thought before this, nothing he entertained the notion of actually doing. He chose those he took to bed with care, and he could imagine few scenarios in which death during sex would be a necessary measure.

It was barely a full ten seconds before Will stirred beneath him, breath filling his lungs as his chest began to rise and fall. He shifted slightly, but otherwise remained motionless, Hannibal's dead weight on top of him.

Hannibal turned his head to press an open-mouthed kiss to the side of Will's face. He felt utterly spent, incapable of movement, almost incapable of speech.

Will exhaled, long and slow, his hand coming up to rest at the back of Hannibal's head.

"Was that satisfactory?" Hannibal slurred, the words barely sounding like English to him.

"Most definitely."

Hannibal was still buried in Will, his cock soft but lodged in Will's warmth. Will's cock was trapped between them, and Hannibal could feel the stickiness there, as well as the tacky feeling from the blood that had dried on both their chests. He was dissatisfied with none of it, though one thought did occur to him.

"All this and I haven't even tasted you," Hannibal breathed.

Will chuckled, a deep vibration in his chest. "I'm amenable to rectifying that. But not tonight, I don't think."

"Tomorrow morning, perhaps."

"Trying to entice me to stay?"

"I have yet to have the pleasure of waking up next to you." Hannibal shifted with some effort, propping himself up on his elbows. "Nor the pleasure of becoming entangled while we sleep."

Will laughed softly to himself. "Who holds the Devil, let him hold him well."

"Faust." Hannibal smiled. "Must I hold you well to keep you, Will?"

"Not at all." Will stretched beneath him, giving him a lazy grin. "You could hardly keep me away."

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Well, this is it! Thanks to everyone who read! I don't have any plans for more in this verse at the moment, as I've done everything I wanted to do with these two, but you also never know when inspiration might strike again. :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hannibal put the finishing touches on his bow tie, gave his reflection a final look in the mirror, and stepped out of his dressing room.

Will was in the bedroom, already dressed in a black tux and a black shirt. Hannibal was not normally fond of an ensemble without contrast, and it was never something he would have chosen for himself, but he couldn't deny that Will made a striking figure in it.

Hannibal made no attempt to hide his appreciation as he approached Will, whose gaze lingered on him in turn.

“Shall we?” Hannibal asked with a smile.

“By all means.” Will gestured toward the door.

Hannibal preceded him through it, and they both made their way towards the first floor.

It had been almost six months since Will's appearance in his life. They had fallen into an easy routine, though it was by no means dull. In a more conventional situation, Hannibal would have said they were living together, but nothing about Will was conventional. Sometimes Will would stay for hours, sometimes days. He came and went like a specter, arriving with the step of a footfall in the hall and leaving with a whisper of silk as he slid from between the sheets. When he was gone, there was never any evidence that he had been there at all. Will took up a surprising lack of physical space in the house, with no need or inclination for possessions. Even his clothing seemed to materialize at his whims.

Hannibal's days were full with things other than Will, as were many of his nights. He had yet to tempt Will to share a kill again, though the cool smile Will had given him when he'd raised the subject told him that the wait would be worth it. Hannibal still only had vague ideas about what Will did while attending his own business elsewhere, but some knowledge could wait to be received. After all, they had all the time in the world.

Hannibal reached the foyer and moved to pull his coat out of the closet. “You still haven't told me what your intentions are this evening.”

“I don't have any intentions,” Will said. “This evening was your idea.”

“I enjoy the arts,” Hannibal agreed. “As do you, based on our conversations. You’re incredibly knowledgeable and well-versed on a wide variety of topics.” One corner of his mouth turned up. “Impossibly so, some might say.”

Will smiled. “I’ve had a lot of time on my hands.”

Hannibal smiled in turn, putting on his coat. “This evening’s performance will be masterful. Even one of the harshest critics referred to the performer’s voice as transcendent. I’m pleased you were amenable to joining me.”

“It will be a memorable experience.” It was obvious Will was dancing around the topic Hannibal was alluding to, and was amusing himself by doing so.

“There will be many people I’m acquainted with in attendance,” Hannibal said. “Do you have any thoughts on how I should introduce you or our relationship?”

“None at all,” Will said smoothly. “But I have no interest in maintaining any particular lies. Choose your words carefully, or I’ll likely undo them.”

Hannibal’s eyes narrowed fractionally as he tried to parse out what Will meant. Will’s smirk grew in response.

Hannibal licked his lips, intrigued. “You have never sustained a fictional identity?”

“I never had the inclination. I move in the world in the short term. I reflect whatever I need to be, but whatever image I present is fleeting.”

Hannibal began to grasp the game Will was playing; undoubtedly it would add an element of unpredictability to the evening. “We are not fleeting,” he commented. “You are yourself with me.”

“That’s your problem, not mine.” Will coolly raised a brow. “How you explain my presence in your life is entirely your affair.”

Hannibal tilted his head in consideration. “Yet if I invent a fictitious history for you, you’ll be unlikely to corroborate it. At the same time, you leave such details for me to arrange.”

“You’re the one who wants to be social.” Will’s voice was nonchalant, but there was a challenge in his eyes. “We can always stay in.”

Hannibal, however, was far from displeased with the turn events were taking. He had tried to persuade Will to join him for several past events, but this was the first Will had agreed to. If there were conditions to the evening, that only made it a more interesting pursuit.

Will moved, putting on an overcoat he hadn’t been holding a second ago.

“And if I were to say you were the Devil himself?” Hannibal asked, just to see how Will would respond.

“I’d be unlikely to corroborate that, either,” Will said, smoothing out the lapels of his coat. “And your fine reputation would suffer.”

Hannibal felt a smile tug at his lips. “You construct an excellent game, Will. I’m certain this evening will be most enjoyable.”

Hannibal timed their arrival perfectly, with enough time to leisurely take their seats, but not enough to socialize before the performance. The performance itself was as magnificent as he had anticipated, and he gave the singer his full attention, as she deserved. He was wholly appreciative of Will’s presence next to him, but he was also absorbed by the voice that filled the room.

Will seemed pleased with the evening as well, though Hannibal was looking forward to a more private conversation where he could perhaps elicit a comparison to concerts that only Will and the long dead had heard.

They weren’t alone for long after the performance, nor had Hannibal expected them to be. He had barely finished helping them each to a glass of champagne before Mrs. Komeda approached them.

“A pleasure as always to see you, Hannibal.”

“The pleasure is mine,” Hannibal said with a nod of his head. “Allow me to introduce you to Will.” He gestured between them. “Will agreed to accompany me this evening. And Mrs. Komeda is a longtime patron of the arts.”

“Charmed,” Mrs. Komeda said, holding out her hand.

Will took it in a gentle handshake. “Likewise.”

Mrs. Komeda smiled. “I must say, you two made quite the stir tonight.”

“Have we?” Hannibal asked, feigning innocence.

“Oh, you know you have,” she teased. “I’ve never seen you bring anyone to one of these things besides Alana Bloom, and even that was two years ago.”

“It seems I’m in rare company, then,” Will said, the ghost of a smile on his lips.

“Hannibal is always rare company. His guest lists are the most exclusive in town.” She lowered her voice. “And several people in my circle considered him one of the most eligible bachelors.”

Will seemed amused. He raised a brow as he looked at Hannibal. “I wasn’t aware you were deemed such a catch.”

“That is because I regard myself as the one making the catch.”

Will took a sip of champagne. "Then far be it from me to argue the point with you."

"Indeed you shouldn't," Mrs. Komeda said, clearly enjoying herself. "Hannibal, wherever did you find such a delightful young man?"

Hannibal leaned in, conspiratorial. "I made a deal with the Devil," he whispered with a smile.

Mrs. Komeda laughed. "Oh, you!" she said, patting his arm. "Fine, keep your secrets. That only makes it all the more intriguing for the gossips."

"There should remain some mystery to my life outside the opera," Hannibal said pleasantly. "Don't you think?"

Mrs. Komeda laughed again.

At that moment, they were interrupted by the approach of two men, one of whom Hannibal already knew. Franklyn awkwardly stood to the side, waiting to be acknowledged.

"Hello," Hannibal greeted him, unable to do otherwise.

Franklyn shook his hand. "It's good to see you." He gestured to the man behind him. "This is my friend, Tobias."

Hannibal nodded, shaking the other man's hand. "Good evening."

"And how do you two know each other?" Mrs. Komeda asked.

"I'm one of his patients," Franklyn said, not bothered at all. "And who's this?" he said, looking to Will.

"This is Will," Hannibal said.

Will said hello to each of them in turn.

"I saw you two come in together," Franklyn addressed Hannibal. "Are you friends, or...?"

Before Hannibal could come up with a graceful reply, Will simply said, "Something more." But there was no spite behind it, only exasperation.

Franklyn nodded, undaunted. "It's just, you've never mentioned him," he said to Hannibal.

"It would be unprofessional to talk about my personal life during your time, Franklyn."

Mrs. Komeda and Will both stood silently as Franklyn directed the conversation. Mrs. Komeda was gently embarrassed; Will was simply uninterested in speaking.

Tobias spoke. "Franklyn does a great deal of talking about you, however."

"All good things, I hope," Hannibal said.

"Of course," Tobias said. He met Hannibal's eyes with a sharp gaze.

“I might have mentioned that I thought you’d be here,” Franklyn said. “This seemed like it might be your sort of thing.”

“And it is, in fact,” Hannibal said agreeably. “I hope you enjoyed the performance as much as I did. But now you must excuse us. I’ve just spotted an old friend, and we must say hello.”

They exchanged final pleasantries, and soon he and Will were walking in the other direction.

“You extricated yourself from that well,” Will said, amusement in his voice.

Hannibal exhaled. “I’m afraid I’m going to have to refer Franklyn. He’s becoming fixated on me, and it’s impeding his progress.”

Will nodded absently. Under his breath, he said, “Tobias is a killer.”

“Is he indeed?” Hannibal asked. “I thought I recognized something in him; I’m pleased I was correct. Does he have suspicions about me?”

“His instincts are not as fine as yours. He’s planning on killing you simply because he dislikes Franklyn’s interest in you,” Will said, giving no weight to the words beyond a report on the state of things.

Hannibal gave them due consideration. “I’m not surprised. Psychopaths are possessive. He would want Franklyn to himself until he decides he’s done with him.”

“You don’t seem worried,” Will commented.

“Should I be?”

Will smiled. “Not at all.”

Hannibal licked his lips. “Perhaps I can tempt you to join me this time.”

“I had already decided to,” Will said smoothly.

Hannibal’s pulse jumped at the certainty of Will spilling blood with him again. He had already been in an excellent mood, but the expectation of what was to come elated him. “I shall greatly look forward to it,” he said. “I had hardly expected the evening to give us such a wonderful opportunity.”

“This thrills you.” There was no surprise in Will’s tone, just satisfaction.

“I have only seen you in your glory once, and have long desired to do so again. But the rarity of such an event also contributes to its beauty.” He paused. “Tell me, what about Tobias decided you? It’s not on my account, I hope?”

Will snorted at the suggestion. “You hardly need my help.” He shook his head. “He deserves my hand, and he practically gift wrapped himself.”

Hannibal smirked. "One can hardly refuse a present when it falls in one's lap. He shall be a present to us both."

He idly pondered whether it would be more satisfying to catch Tobias unawares, or to simply wait until Tobias made a move himself and then turn the tables. Perhaps whichever one presented itself first; he was adaptable.

A moment later, Hannibal paused as he caught the eye of Alana, who was talking to a small group several dozen paces away. She smiled and waved her fingers at him.

Hannibal waited with Will where he was, unwilling to insert himself into the conversation when he would rather introduce her to Will alone. "Alana is a dear friend and colleague," he told Will, "and a regular guest at my dinner parties."

"Did you have a romantic relationship?" There was nothing of jealousy in Will's voice, only curiosity.

"We once had a flirtation with a relationship. I considered pursuing it further, but had no particular reason to do so. It was not a façade I wished to engage in long term, and I thought it unwise to allow an affair to destroy the long relationship I had already cultivated."

Will nodded, taking a drink from his glass. "A trusted friend is more valuable than a disappointed lover."

"Precisely." Hannibal smiled to himself, pleased that Will understood his motivations so well. "It seemed more prudent to return to our friendship. I allowed her to bring up the topic first and then agreed with her about our lack of romantic chemistry. Some months later, I introduced her to her wife."

Will looked incredulous. "I find it hard to imagine you in the role of matchmaker."

Hannibal chuckled. "It was quite inadvertent. Margot was my patient for several sessions before she asked for a referral to a psychiatrist who was more specialized in trauma. I directed her to Alana. Alana only saw Margot for one session before she ended their doctor-patient relationship and began seeing her in another capacity altogether." Hannibal gestured with his glass, raising it slightly. "Ah, here they come now."

There was a spark of interest in Will's eyes as he watched the two women approach. Hannibal studied him, curious, but his attention was soon diverted by Alana as she came to stand next to him.

"Hannibal," she greeted him with a smile.

"Alana. What a pleasant surprise. It is a rare but lovely treat to see you at the opera."

Alana continued to smile. "Whereas it's one of your usual haunts."

"You know me too well. But what has brought you here this evening?"

"Appearances," Margot said. "It was a charity performance. We made a large contribution."

“A most worthy cause,” Hannibal agreed with a nod. Then, “Forgive me, I’ve been appallingly rude. Allow me to introduce you. Alana, Margot—Will. Alana and Margot are old friends of mine, and Will is the new person in my life.”

Will nodded to them. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Alana responded in kind as he shook her hand.

Margot gave Will a breezy smile. “And here I thought I knew everyone worth knowing.”

Alana laughed. “Hannibal has always been the one who knows everyone worth knowing.”

“Clearly.” Margot took a drink from her glass. “I need to expand my social circle.”

“You and Alana are always welcome at my table,” Hannibal said. “The next dinner party I throw, you may have the seat of honor.”

“An invitation we could hardly refuse,” Margot said, with a smile in Alana’s direction. Then she added, “As long as Will doesn’t object to my having his seat.”

“Unfortunately, I have yet to tempt Will to attend one of my parties.”

“It would require me to be sociable,” Will said, a wry smile on his lips.

Alana smiled, giving him a curious look. “This isn’t being sociable?”

“This is mingling after the fact. I prefer a performance to performing for others.”

Alana wasn’t affronted, but she glanced sideways at Hannibal, clearly wondering about his reaction to Will’s words.

“Will and I have different ideas in some respects about what constitutes a pleasant diversion,” Hannibal said, enjoying himself immensely.

Will sipped at his champagne. “In other respects, we agree completely.”

“Differences keep things interesting,” Margot said. “How did you two meet?”

“I encountered Will once in my youth, in passing,” Hannibal said easily. “When our paths recently crossed again, I was completely taken with him and immediately invited him to dinner.”

The barest hint of a smirk graced Will’s lips as he raised his glass subtly in Hannibal’s direction, amused by the half-truths he was telling.

Alana looked at Hannibal, happy for him but surprised. “I’ve never heard you be so frank about matters of the heart.”

“Love either pays you a visit or he doesn’t. I had never expected to be struck, as it were, but life has a way of astonishing us.” He allowed a slightly teasing expression to settle over his

features. “I consider myself fortunate that my sentiments were returned. I don’t know what I would have suffered otherwise.”

“I’m sure it would have been Hell,” Will said dryly.

Alana and Margot softly laughed. Hannibal joined them, delighted that Will had taken part in his word game.

Alana looked at Will afterward. “And what do you do, Will?” she asked.

“I’m a student of humanity,” Will replied.

Margot was the first to recognize the euphemism for not needing an occupation. “I’ve been there.” She nodded and took a drink of champagne. “Well, still am. But I like having a project, at least for now.”

Hannibal nodded. “Margot is transforming the Verger empire into the largest provider of cruelty-free meat in the world.”

“An commendable project,” Will commented.

“We have the resources,” she said. “It’s about time someone put them to good use. The Verger name needed a new legacy after my brother.”

“I’m certain it will be a successful one,” Hannibal said, raising his glass to her. “I myself always employ an ethical butcher. You can taste the difference.” He glanced at Alana. “Don’t you agree?”

“I’ll agree that I’ve never eaten a bad dish at your table. But I think that has something to do with the skill of the chef.”

Hannibal tilted his head. “Oh, but better meat gives the chef more room to shine.”

Alana smiled, taking a sip from her glass. “A suitable compromise.”

“Speaking of business,” Margot said, “I unfortunately have an early meeting tomorrow. It’s about time for us to make a graceful exit.”

“Then I will not keep you,” Hannibal said.

Margot and Alana exchanged goodbyes with them, Alana saying a final, “It was nice to meet you, Will,” as she walked away.

Hannibal watched them go. The crowd general was breaking up, and he and Will stood alone from the other groups thinly spread throughout the room.

“I was surprised to see Margot tonight,” Will said casually. “I’ve met her before.”

“Have you?” Hannibal regarded him with curiosity, remembering Will’s initial interest upon seeing Margot and Alana. He could imagine only a few reasons for it. “Did she make a deal

with you?”

Will took a drink of his champagne. “She did.”

“For the death of her brother,” Hannibal surmised. Mason Verger had suffered a fatal fall in a rather grisly fashion, and Margot had become an heiress.

“For his demise, as well as her inheritance. A rotten board and an error in the will—an easy bargain for a soul.”

“It’s curious,” Hannibal said, thoughtful, “I once told Margot that she needed to wait to kill her brother until she could get away with it, or find someone to do it for her. It seems she did the latter. She found you.”

Will gave a minuscule shrug. “I found her.”

“What drew you to her?”

“The same thing that drew me to you: desperation. For you, it was desperation and grief, for her, it was desperation and terror. She had just realized that her brother intended to have a baby—with her, one way or the other.” One corner of Will’s mouth turned up. “It was only a few days later that he had his unfortunate slip into the pigpen.”

Hannibal was intrigued by the information, as well as the fact that Will had been involved in something that he himself had been peripherally concerned in.

“It seems our earlier paths were divided by mere degrees of separation,” Hannibal said. “A fascinating occurrence.”

Will’s shook his head in response to Hannibal’s implication. “You had no bearing on my actions with Margot, nor did she have any on mine with you. When my attention is drawn, it’s the result of an emotion so strong it overpowers everything else. Unless I have reason to, I don’t delve into the minutiae.” He paused. “I look at someone and see the truth of them. You weren’t part of her truth.”

Hannibal accepted Will’s account of the matter. Though he couldn’t help but asking, “And if you had seen me in the minutiae of her mind?”

Will gave him an arch look. “Then our paths would have collided at the time. I wouldn’t have been able to resist.”

“I can think of no better outcome than the one we have obtained,” Hannibal said. “Though it seems coincidence could have brought us to another.”

“Coincidence or fate,” Will mused. “Where does the difference lie?”

“You consider our involvement fated?”

Will’s lips twisted in a sharp grin. “Shouldn’t I? You were practically made for me.”

“If I was made for you, we must have another conversation about the intentions of God. Such an action would hardly paint him in a positive light.”

Will continued to smile, finishing the last of his champagne. “Such points could be debated for eternity. I can think of more appealing things to do with you.”

“When put thusly, I have no choice but to concur,” Hannibal said, sipping from his own glass in good humor. After a moment, he returned to their previous topic. “Margot did not recognize you.”

“She had never seen this face before.”

“And what did you see in her this day?”

Will’s eyes tracked in the direction of Margot and Alana, who were waiting for their coats, their heads bent as they spoke to each other.

“Nothing that interests me,” Will said. “It seems cruelty is not a thing which simply flows in Verger blood. Margot only wants to make a life for herself, and to improve the lives of others.” He glanced at Hannibal. “It seems she’ll be one of my exceptions.”

“And yet I imagine the outcome she anticipates upon her death will haunt her dreams, cast shadows on moments of happiness when she least expects it.”

Will shrugged. “It’s the lowest price one can pay.”

Hannibal scanned the room, thinking that it was perhaps time to make their own exit. The evening had turned out most splendidly, and he was in good cheer. He nodded to Will, and they began a slow walk towards the doors.

They collected their coats at the front and moved to stand in the foyer while Hannibal waited for the valet to bring his car. Tobias separated from the crowd and approached them.

“Nice to see you, again,” he greeted Hannibal.

“Likewise,” Hannibal said. He made a show of looking around. “No Franklyn?”

“He went to get the car.” Tobias dropped his voice as he confided, “He paid so much for his ticket he had to park in the flat rate lot down the street.”

“I’m glad he was able to attend, however he managed it,” Hannibal said, letting the indiscretion of talking about another’s finances pass without mention.

He and Will were going to kill Tobias anyway.

By all appearances, Will was uninterested in the conversation, and part of Hannibal’s mind took a moment to marvel at him. There wasn’t a spark in Will’s eyes or even a hint of secret amusement. Hannibal prided himself in his own disguise, but Will was a perfect mirror of what he chose to reflect. If Hannibal hadn’t known for a fact that he was the Devil incarnate, he himself would have thought Will nothing more than another bored socialite.

Tobias certainly suspected nothing.

“Perhaps our meeting was fortuitous,” Hannibal said, seizing the opening Tobias had presented. “I’ve heard your name in passing. You own a string shop, am I correct?”

“I do,” Tobias said, preening. “I specialize in handmade gut by the finest craftsmen.”

Hannibal nodded. “I have a harpsichord that needs restringing. Perhaps I could make an appointment for you to inspect it?”

“I only do appointments after hours, when my shop is closed,” Tobias said. It was a maneuver for an invitation after dark, and Hannibal was happy to play him in return.

“Not a problem,” Hannibal said. “We are mostly at home in the evenings.”

Will looked at Hannibal and gave a small shrug. “I’ll let you arrange the details.” He did nothing else to indicate that he was particularly interested in the proceedings.

Hannibal could see Tobias assessing Will and deciding to kill them both, dismissing Will as an easily removed obstacle. That would make the moment later when Will was revealed to be the most vicious of them all even more compelling. Anticipation thrummed through Hannibal at the thought.

“We could make an evening of it,” Hannibal suggested to Tobias. “You can determine what my instrument needs, and then I could cook for you.”

“You don’t need to feel obligated,” Tobias said, though it was a token protest. “House calls for larger instruments are a regular service, no meal required. I wouldn’t want to impose.”

Will shrugged. “It’s no imposition.”

“Indeed not.” Hannibal smiled. “Will and I would love to have you for dinner.”

—the end

Chapter End Notes

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